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## No Guarantee Of Quality Homeschool Alibi

By Frosty Troy

Bad law has a bad outcome when an Appeals Court rules that parents wishing to homeschool their children must have a teaching credential.

Don't blame the California court. Facts in the case were clear enough: Two homeschooled children filed for declaratory relief, citing emotional and physical abuse by their father.

Parents were keeping the children at home to conceal abuse. The father claimed he kept his children home because "educating children outside the home exposes them to 'snitches.'"

Sure, such as blowing the whistle on parents who physically, sexually or emotionally abuse their offspring.

In Oklahoma, a former juvenile public defender said abusive parents routinely claim they are homeschooling when in fact children receive little in the way of education.

Another home school dodge is the parent[s] with a wild child, skipping school, shoplifting, etc. Once in court, a juvenile judge is told the child is being homeschooled.

Ask any teacher who has faced homeschooled children. On average, many are well below grade level. Don't be swayed by the occasional spelling bee champs. They probably had parents equipped to teach at home.

In Oklahoma, school superintendents who are charged by state law to see that all school-age children are being educated are not even allowed to ask about homeschooled children.

In a redneck state homeschoolers are royalty. They flood the Capitol where legislators are fearful of even raising the subject of quality of homeschooling.

Findings in California in the lower court trial were that all eight children in that family had been homeschooled, solely by the mother.

The lower court ruled that the quality of the education they received was "lousy," "meager" and "bad."

Article IX, Section 1 of California's Constitution states: "A general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, the Legislature shall encourage by all suitable means the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral, and agri-

cultural improvement."

The California Assembly, to this end, passed the education code, which required that parents either send their children to private or public school or have them taught at home by people credentialed to teach each grade.

In Oklahoma the constitutional loophole is glaring. Article XIII, under compulsory attendance, reads:

"The Legislature shall provide for the compulsory attendance at some public or other school, unless other means of education are provided, of all the children in the state who are sound in mind and body, between the ages of eight and sixteen years, for at least three months a year."

Most Oklahomans think homeschooling is an unalloyed right. Do you need a license to teach? Not if Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, has his way. He authors a bill that would cre-

ate 10 public school districts free to shed all mandates – including teacher certification.

This flies in the face of Oklahoma's House Bill 1017 reforms, heralded nationally, ranking among the best-trained teachers in America. In Oklahoma it's a five-year degree program and required certification.

One of the reforms then-Gov. Henry Bellmon pushed through the Legislature in House Bill 1017 was seeing to it that teachers would not only be certified, but also certified in the field in which they taught.

Republicans, who now control the Legislature, have abandoned 1017 and its best provisions – certification, class size and adequate funding.

The math problem facing America is understandable since a third of those teaching math are not certified in that field.



Sen. Ford claims there are too many funded and unfunded mandates. Yes, and most have flown from the bill-writing pens of Republican legislators, including several more in the current session.

The California court, finding justice for the abused children, followed the law and ruled the only way that it could, given it was not a child welfare case, but a home education case.

Imagine the uproar if an Oklahoma governor or legislator proposed requiring certification for homeschool parents.

Many homeschoolers buy a packaged curriculum that may or may not meet the standards of the local district. Many times it is super-religious.

The Observer led the fight a few years ago to allow homeschooled children to enroll in CareerTech – in some small way helping socialize homeschooled children.

The California uproar was immediate and vociferous, especially from the religious right, who saw this as a case of the state trying to destroy their right to raise their children as good Christians and lousy scientists.

Every politician in the state vowed to amend the law to void the opinion in future cases. Even the Governor chimed in – he who speaks broken English despite many years in this country.

Is all homeschooling deficient? No one knows the answer to that question, though there are obviously some well-educated kids coming from a homeschooling background.

But what about the others who have been taught creationism, the world is only 10,000 years old and this is a "Christian" nation. Goodbye civics.

Of course there are young people coming out of public schools and top-ranked Oklahoma colleges who share the same narrow view – check dozens of members of the Oklahoma Legislature.

There is little doubt that 1.1 million homeschooled children are the next wave of religious right nutballs, seeing evolution and global warming as secular myths.

See ALIBI Page 19

# Observations

## Bad Bills

The press release said they were "Republican education reforms." We have lost count of the crimes committed in the Legislature under the rubric of "reform."

The Senate voted in favor of a "tax credit" for private school scholarship programs when in fact it's a voucher bill for Tulsa private schools.

A so-called expansion of charter schools to include federally-recognized Native American tribes just adds more misery for public education.

The worst was the third bill that would create 10 public school districts free of all mandates – including no certified teachers.

These monstrosities are intended to hurt public education, not help. That's always been the motive of this new breed of Republican legislators.

What is pathetic is the Senate Democrats who lined up in support. We often wonder how half a dozen Senate Democrats can walk upright without spines.

Sen. James A. Williamson, R-Tulsa, successfully attached his amendment creating the voucher scheme. It passed 30-18 in an evenly divided Senate.

Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, successfully passed SB 2100 through the Senate by a 27-19 margin. The bill would create a trial program that would allow 10 entire school districts in Oklahoma to be removed from state mandates and regulations.

The Senate also adopted SB 1669 by Co-President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, on a 26-19 vote. The bill would allow Native American tribes to establish charter schools in Oklahoma and Tulsa counties.

How do we improve failing schools by allowing the best and brightest to leave? How do you improve public education by sucking funds out of a badly underfunded system?

Nobody is kidding anybody. Republicans have a relentless zeal to privatize or weaken public schools, thus killing the Oklahoma Education Association.

Surely the "education governor"

would veto these bills if they reach his desk.

## Whoopee

There are some surveys we would just as soon skip, such as a new one from France. It notes that French women simply don't suffer from the same dramatic, post-40s slide into sexual obsolescence as American women.

A new national survey finds that French women over 50 are having more sex than they did 15 years ago.

In the U.S., on the other hand, a third of women in their 50s and half of women in their 60s have no sex at all.

That's right: While American women are sitting around feeling bad about their necks, French women are making whoopee.

Leave it to the French to be out of step with the rest of the world – lucky devils.

## Merit What?

This first nationwide report card is in and the news is that so-called merit pay plans are not performing as the authors claimed they would. Check the findings in the March 12 issue of Education Week.

One so-called merit pay plan has cleared the Oklahoma House. You would have known by the author that it was more of an attack on public education that something beneficial.

Ex-Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, has made a career out of defaming public education. He called for a total ban on pay raises for teachers, despite Oklahoma ranking 48th nationally – dead last in the region.

Some anti-public education "experts" have tried to put a happy face on the performance pay studies, saying they showed a tiny improvement on test scores in a few districts.

It was best summarized by Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality: "I worry that



our enthusiasm for professional pay has gotten way ahead of our knowledge."

In Little Rock merit pay resulted in teachers teaching to the test. In Missouri the plan resulted in virtually no improvement in test scores.

Cargill's plan ought to die in the Senate. Barring that, Gov. Brad Henry should get out his veto stamp.

## Sold!

Have any doubt that our senior U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe is owned body and soul by the oil industry?

He has already raked in half a million dollars since 2000 from that industry and is willing to drill in Arlington National Cemetery if it keeps the money coming.

We acknowledge the importance of the oil and gas industry to Oklahoma but there is a difference between campaign donations and buying a member of Congress.

Almost anyone with half a brain knows if we don't get a handle on American campaign financing, we will continue to see health care, gas and food prices soar.

We think we can't lose this country – but we can.

## Reforms Die

The Republican state senators, a wholly owned subsidiary of the insurance industry, have killed vital reform bills.

Sen. Charles Laster, D-Shawnee, had a bill that would have reestablished the Board for Property and Casualty Insurance Rates. In the Senate Appropriations Committee every Republican voted against it.

The bill was aimed at curbing arbitrary insurance rate increases and practices.

A bill by Sen. John Sparks, D-Norman, died as Republican members of the Retirement and Insurance Committee voted against his measure aimed at ensuring insurance companies pay for medical procedures that had been "pre-authorized."

In another Senate committee, a bill to establish a Patient's Bill of Rights authored by Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, squeaked out of commit-

tee with only one Republican voting for it.

Laster said Senate Democrats would continue pushing insurance reform so that Oklahomans can have greater access to affordable healthcare.

One bill that made it was one that would require insurance companies to pay for medical expenses for Oklahomans involved in clinical trials. It is known as "Stefanie's Law" by Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC.

Do we need to remind you that more than 400,000 Oklahomans are without medical coverage? How sad that a few simple reforms are killed by greed-heads in the insurance industry.

## Looking Up!

With Democrat Bill Foster winning former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert's old seat in a special congressional election in Illinois, the future of the Democratic Party looks good.

In Oklahoma, party leader Ivan Holmes is lining up excellent candidates and hopes to challenge every single legislative seat – including those held by Republicans.

Holmes is working without pay, assisted by two fired-up workers furnished by the national Democratic Party.

Oklahoma has been trending Republican for several reasons, the No. 1 being pulpit politics.

Democrats have been cursed with a governor who has done little to build the party. That may be changing.

Gov. Brad Henry is now busy raising money, feting donors and has promised to work for the Democratic ticket.

The new Republican House majority in the Legislature has been a disaster.

The Religious Right's grip on the state has loosened, especially when its poster boy, GOP Rep. Lance Cargill, is ending his political career in disgrace.

Strong Democratic candidates for governor are on the horizon, Lt. Gov. Jari Askins and State Treasurer Scott Meacham.

It isn't Holy Writ that Oklahoma keeps shifting to the far right. Given George W. Bush's disastrous performance, many conservative Democrats are thinking about coming home.

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

# Observerscope

The Republican war against public education is underway at the Capitol. As the Associated Press reported, nearly \$100 million is on the chopping block. CareerTech has already been gutted.

**Dart:** To the goobers in the Legislature, yawning when Medicaid for 700,000 Oklahomans is losing \$142 million in federal aid.

Oklahoma still leads the nation in Pre-Kindergarten, but more districts, shortchanged by the Legislature, are having trouble funding free half days for four year olds.

**Laurel:** To Pope Benedict for condemning our continued presence in Iraq, an unjust war destabilizing the entire world.

There are 3.2 million teachers in public education but 2.8 million new ones needed by 2015. Crisis? You bet – 30% of new teachers quit within three years, citing working conditions, not salaries.

**Dart:** To ex-Democrat Wanda Jo Stapleton for a personal attack on Democratic Party Chief Ivan Holmes for not coming out against welfare for the SuperSonics. He doesn't make policy – the Central Committee does.

The sneak attack on the Ethics Commission by Rep. Ken Miller, R-Edmond, failed and he has agreed to take it out of HJR 1099. It proves again that few members read the bills.

**Laurel:** To a majority of Americans not fooled by Bush promotion of vouchers. The Gallup Poll shows 67% opposed, 33% supportive. Vouchers are a dagger in the heart of public education.

The Democratic Party doesn't need to shop for enemies when it has Democrats like Carroll Fisher, Jeff McMahon and Eliot Spitzer.

**Dart:** To Rep. Rex Duncan, R-Sand Springs, only vote against providing defibrillators in public schools.

The IRS is investigating Texas pastors who used a front to funnel \$1.26 million to Gov. Rick Perry's re-election bid. [Texas Freedom Network]

**Laurel:** To House Democrats for taking a stand for removing the sales tax from food before any more Republican tax cuts are enacted. Repubs treat plain folk like a baby treats a diaper.

If the Alliance for Oklahoma's Future is correct, the looming state budget shortfall will hit \$1.2 billion. This results from a lack of leadership at the State Capitol, including the largest tax cuts in history.

**Dart:** To Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, captured on tape by KGOU prior to authoring HB 1804. If he were Mexican, he said, he would also enter America illegally if it helped his family. Poor Randy – his carnival left town without him.

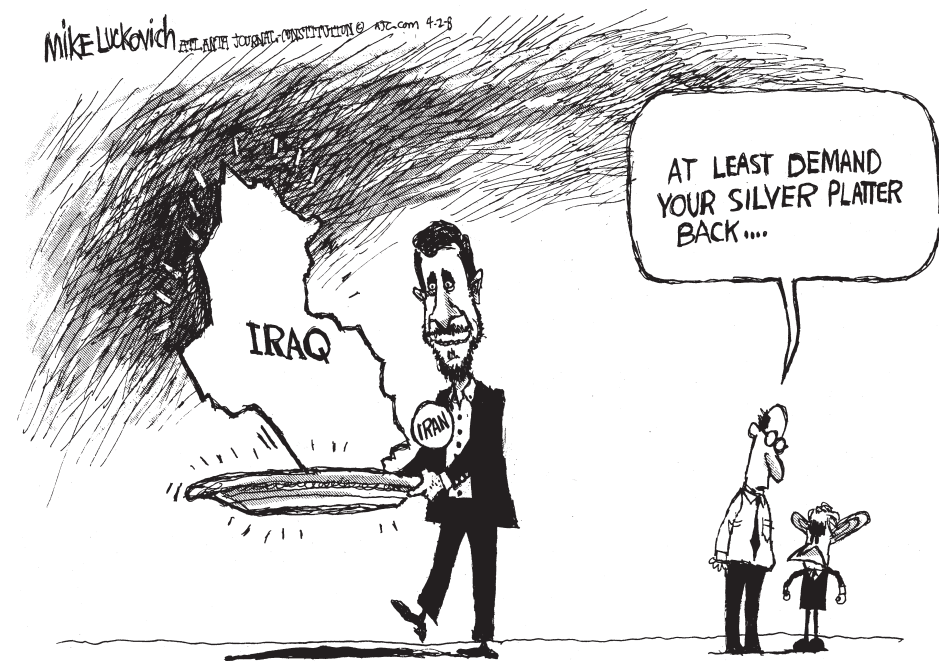
More than 13 million Mexicans are in this country illegally. Why? Drug cartels corrupt so many officials, they control the industrial heartland and coastal tourists areas. Their drug take last year? Upwards of \$23 billion.

**Laurel:** To Sen. Tom Ivester, D-Elk City, for his SB 1825, long overdue update of the Oklahoma Uniform Trust Code.

We will stand and cheer for the GOP's claim to promote "openness" and "transparency" in state government when they are no longer exempt from the open records and open meetings law and the Central Purchasing Act.

**Dart:** To Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, for putting out a press release saying veterans would be treated unfairly unless they were allowed to carry guns on college campuses. He needs a padded cell.

You might not want to take the kids to visit Amsterdam municipal parks. New rules allow sex in the park but no dogs without leashes. What have they got against dogs?



**Laurel:** To retired District Judge Gary Miller, named to head the Department of Human Services Children and Family Services Division. Linda Smith has retired from that post after 33 years of wonderful service.

The law firm hired at \$250 an hour to handle the impeachment proceedings against State Auditor Jeff McMahon is Lester, Loving and Davis. Loving is Susan Loving, former Democratic AG.

**Dart:** To Gov. Brad Henry, appointing a Council for Workforce and Economic Development, then walking off. Members are frustrated about what they are supposed to be doing. Hey Gov, say hello to Aunt Bea and Opie.

The rabid Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs continues to attack CareerTech, but ask the business and industry sector, they love it. OCPA – so little time, so much manure to shovel.

**Laurel:** To State Sen. Connie Johnson, D-OKC, for her bill establishing a task force to study why Oklahoma leads the nation in the percentage of women in prison [2,587]. An estimated 60% have mental problems.

Shell companies with no assets are operating some Oklahoma nursing homes, with no liability insurance. The Health Department said it has no authority to require insurance. Well, get the authority.

**Dart:** To congressional Democrats for not instantly killing the No Child Left Behind Act. It is grossly underfunded. For example, Oklahoma has lost \$12.5 million in Title 1-A funding. [Center on Educational Policy]

This November will be the last time you see the equipment used in state elections. An upgrade is underway, including 3,000 new voting machines in all 77 counties.

**Laurel:** To Freedom of Information Oklahoma, naming a special award for Ben Blackstock, retired head of the Oklahoma Press Association. Nobody has fought harder for more open government. He was the first recipient.

Our dream is that the Big Shots in state government have to use the east tunnel to the State Capitol – especially when it's standing in water, with tourists and school kids trying to make it through.

**Dart:** To the Oklahoma House for approving a specious bill spelling out what religious roles students can play in public school. It would kill separation of church and state.

Relentless testing has put undue pressure on many students, leading 60% to tell the Josephson Institute they have cheated on an exam at least once. More than 33% said they copied work from the Internet.

**Laurel:** To Oklahoman Charles Edwin Jones, given the Smith-Wynkoop Book Award for his three books on the Holiness movement.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court was pummeled for taking steps to limit access to court records on the Internet. But no one's Social Security number should ever be posted.

**Dart:** To the reckless Bush Administration. According to Pentagon figures, maintaining a sergeant in the Army costs \$180,000 a year. Maintaining a private security contractor costs \$445,000.

Educational Research Service is out with new salary figures for middle and high school principals. In high school the average is \$97,486. In middle schools it is \$91,334.

**Laurel:** To Stanford University research that puts another myth to rest. Catholic school students show no more progress in reading in the early grades and less progress in math. [Education Week]

We belatedly learn that the State Department of Education was already working toward a single graduation rate – something badly needed.

**Dart:** To hypocritical Western powers for holding the Olympics in Beijing despite pollution and brutal oppression. Yet we won't recognize Cuba 90 miles off our shore.

A co-chairman of the McCain campaign, former U.S. Rep. Tom Loeffler, R-TX, and two other campaign aides are on record lobbying for European Airbus to beat Boeing out of a \$35 billion contract to build new aerial refueling tankers. [New York Times]

**Laurel:** To Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for spotting that item in a bill that would let the governor appoint the head of the Ethics Commission. It is being removed from the bill.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer




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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I am disappointed in the attitude of the letter written by J.A. Gowman in the March 25 Observer. He expresses his dismay over Sen. Clinton bashing her fellow Democrat in the current presidential primary campaign. The writer refers to Sens. McCain and Obama using their last names and he refers to Sen. Clinton as "Hillary" as if the men are grown-ups and she is just a silly, little girl. Mr. Gowman's letter fairly smacks of the old label "uppity woman."

It is not so much about personalities, but about the Democratic Party platform. If you don't vote, you are complicit in the support of the Republican Party platform and if a Republican gets elected because you didn't vote, don't gripe about John McCain for the next eight years. You will have lost the right to do so because of archaic thinking.

Nancy Wakely  
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

I cannot believe Republicans dare broach the subject of "national security" for fear the rest of us might recall the party that spent so much of our time and our treasure embarrassing us before the world by revealing every sleazy detail of a president's very personal mistake ... while responsible people in government tried to warn them about terrorists infiltrating our borders [read *Against All Enemies* by Richard A. Clarke]

This is the same war mongering "gang" that allowed "dead-eye" Dick Cheney [the notorious nimrod who mistook his best friend for a pheasant] and his misanthropic minions to lead us into [probably] the most disastrous fiasco we've ever allowed to happen! [read *The Mighty and the Almighty* by Madeline Allbright]. Excuse me! They want us to leave them "in charge" so, now, they can "protect us" from the very dangers they so arrogantly and secretively fomented, and have avowed their intention to continue!!

How did we become a nation of body-counters? I wish I could purchase a small space on the front page of our daily newspaper [above the fold] to report on the daily disasters in Iraq. Just this morning, I had to leaf through to the last page of the last section to read that the invasion of a helpless little country several time zones away will cost us and our children at least \$3 trillion [that's \$3,000,000,000,000] by the time my grandson is 10 years old! At the same time, the political rhetoric from the airways was fraught with

grief over the economy!

Some pernicious pundits cry: "Things are getting 'better' in Iraq!" Not if one more precious child of ours has his legs shot from under him or his brain scrambled or, heaven forbid, his life lost!

Not ... even ... one!  
Carmen Wilkerson  
Muskogee

Editor, The Observer:

The March 25, 2008 issue of the Observer treats the public to an angry fit that distorts thought process to scare me into silence. It is found in a comment inserted at page 3 under the rubric called Observerscope.

The comment misses at least three points. First, my lawsuit was not for age discrimination; second, the issues tendered to the federal court by my suit were not decided against me; and third, the Oklahoma Supreme Court's "plan" for limited public access to public court records was not an adjudicative case decision but its legislation through rules' promulgation.

While judges of a multi-judge court should not and may not comment in a newspaper interview on that court's case decisions, they, like everyone else, are absolutely free to express a view about court legislation that is embodied in the promulgated rules.

The next time you see another chance to skewer me, please consult a better lawyer to arm yourself with correct legal analysis for the aimed frontal assault you so badly misdirected this time.

Marian P. Opala  
Oklahoma City

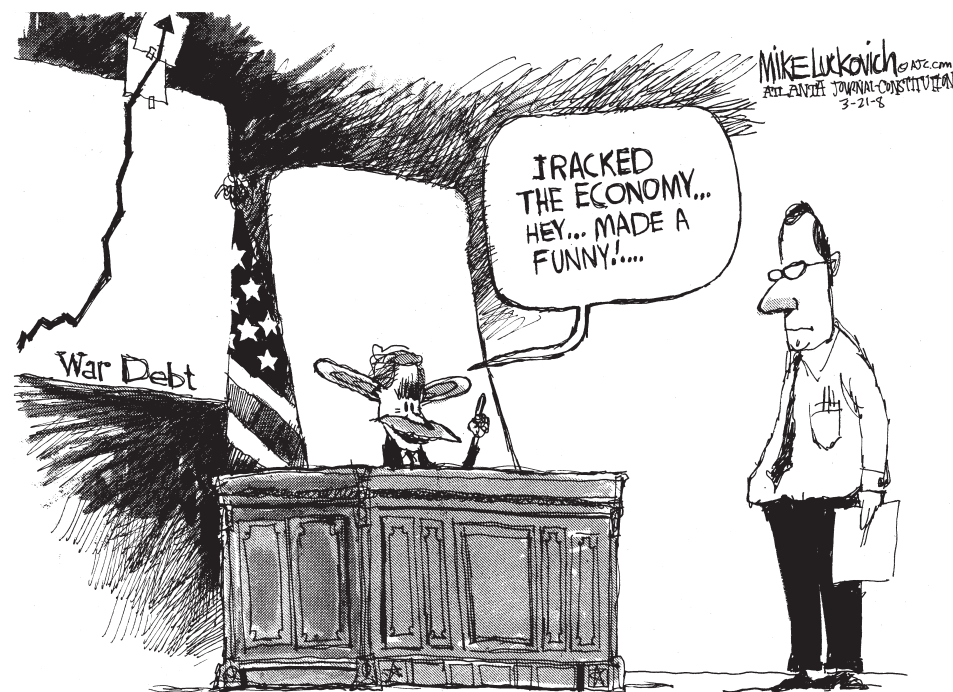
Editor, The Observer:

In your February Observation "DUI Rewarded," you comment that government can be maddening. I find it maddening and disappointing that you should make such comments about the determination to pay unemployment benefits to the worker who lost his job for missing work due to his DUI arrest.

Maddening because you cannot know all the facts and apparently assumed the worker was guilty because he was arrested.

Disappointing because it seems to contradict your usual stands for fairness and your usual inclination to stand up for the rights of workers.

I believe you would normally take the state that arrest is not sufficient proof of guilt. Those are the stands that have made me a long-time personal subscriber, as well as gift subscriber for my sons and grandchildren



every Christmas.

Your comments were further maddening because you attack a government worker for doing his/her job in the same article. You know well that the desk level worker who made the decision to pay those benefits did so according to policy and law. You choose to wave the flag for state workers on one page and then tar them as bureaucrats when they interpret a law in a way that does not set well with you. I'm a retired state employee and I can tell you that salary and benefits are not the only measure of respect that is due such front-line workers.

You like to call shame on the powerful for their wrong deeds. I'll just remind you as I always have my sons: "Don't forget where you came from and don't forget who you are."

Finally, you attack one of the finest and most successful programs of the New Deal. You are right that unemployment insurance was not created to protect drunk drivers, but you also know it was created to protect the economic security of unemployed workers and their families, and in so doing protect our local economies from the perils of unemployment that affect our entire communities when it spreads. I'm 87 years old, and I can remember.

Or have you forgotten that part of where you came from and who you are? Do you know if this worker had children who needed lunch money that next week? Even if we assume the worker was guilty, he lost his job as a result of a stupid act away from it; a job he apparently cared enough about to call his employer from jail. Does further harming his economic security help or hurt the issues that may have contributed to his bad judgment? And what of your own bad judgment in writing as though you know facts you can't possibly know?

Take one of your own darts and sit on it. Maybe it will remind you of who you are and where you came from.

Urban E. Jahnke  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I really wasn't going to renew. I like your paper. I am a solid Democrat. But I did not like your Dart to those who do not want to sell water. I am very much one of those!

Look at all the states that have compacted for water. They have all spent more in litigation than they collected for water.

If Oklahoma ever expects to pros-

per, we must keep our water here and not send it to Texas. If we ever turn the faucet on, we will never be able to turn it off.

Most of your Darts I agree with, but not that one.

Harvey and Alene Arnold  
Atoka

Editor, The Observer:

To be sure, Pastor John Hagee is a right-wing hawk; but somehow, I always thought our side of the political spectrum was more fair than Fox and more real than Rush. I was disappointed.

On page 92 of *In Defense of Israel*, Hagee wrote, "When you correctly see the Jewish people as the family of our Lord, they become our extended family whom we are commanded to love unconditionally."

On page 180 of *Jerusalem Countdown*, Hagee wrote, "It's time for Christianity to reach out to our Jewish brothers and sisters, demonstrating the unconditional love of God."

Do these quotes sound like the anti-Semitic remarks of Louis Farrakhan, of the Nation of Islam, to you? [Syndicated columnist Joe] Conason likening Hagee to Farrakhan sounds like slander to me.

Hagee's books did not blame the Jews for the Holocaust as Conason claimed. To the contrary, Hagee condemned anti-Semitic influences within Christianity.

In the other editorial, it claimed Hagee never said Hitler was Catholic as a youth. But on page 33, he does say that: "Adolf Hitler also attended a Christian school under the tutelage of Padre Bernard Groner. As a small boy, Hitler told a friend that it was his ardent desire to become a priest."

It was selectively dishonest to omit how Hagee also denounced the anti-Semitism in Martin Luther's final tracts. Since the editorial accused Hagee of Catholic bashing, shouldn't it also accuse him of Protestant bashing?

If everyone who acknowledges the anti-Semitic activity of Christians in the Crusades, the Inquisition, and so forth, is a bigot, it includes all historians.

If only all Christian leaders were so honest, we could remove the remains of anti-Semitism from all denominations. Ultimately, a better fellowship between Christians and Jews would result.

Lucia Perri  
Guthrie

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## Frosty's Notebook

# War No More

They came in wheelchairs, on crutches, some with canes. Oklahoma veterans were in the House gallery for a joint legislative session convened to thank them for their service.

It marked the fifth anniversary of the war in Iraq. Not one of the speakers praised a conflict that has claimed 4,000 American lives, including 79 Oklahomans killed and 521 wounded.

Oklahoma is home to more than 350,000 veterans, boasting a proud tradition of selfless service. Oklahoma has honored them with seven Veterans Centers, one of only three states that provide homes and medical care for veterans in need.

Patriotism came easily in the Troy clan – an Uncle John Troy was gassed in World War I; World War II saw my brothers Pat and Leo in the Navy and Marines; brothers John, Kevin and I served in Korea. I brought Kevin's body home from Heartbreak Ridge, later awarded a Silver Star.

John made it a career, serving three tours in the helicopters in Vietnam – four bronze stars. I was the runt of the litter, not qualifying for Golden Gloves or any sport, but I managed to bring home a Bronze Star from Korea.

The joint legislative session marked the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, a war of choice whose purpose, according to President Bush, was "to disarm Iraq, to free its people, and to defend the world from grave danger."

Five years later, it is clear there were no weapons of mass destruction and no grave danger from which to defend. It was all a lie. It was to cost \$50 billion – now experts say it could reach \$3 trillion. And the lies continue.

Yes, the men and women who serve in our armed forces deserve praise for their sacrifice – especially Oklahoma reservists who have done back-to-back tours. Don't forget the families they leave behind – they also serve.

Is the surge the success trumpeted by Bush? Hatred of America grows almost as fast as young al-Qaeda jihadists line up to serve as human bombs.

In 2006, America's own National Intelligence Estimate [NIE] concluded that the war in Iraq had become "the 'cause celebre' for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of U.S. involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement" faster than the United States and its allies can reduce the threat.

The 2007 NIE concluded that "al-Qaeda had reorganized to pre-9/11 strength," largely as a result of the United States turning its attention away from Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to focus on Iraq. We've lost a third of Afghanistan to al-Qaeda.

Also, al-Qaeda's association with insurgents in Iraq helped "energize the

## America's Belt Tightening

Whatever happened to frugality? Thanks to an economy in a perilous dive, stories are blooming about people now forced to live within their means.

It is baffling that people would live otherwise. Of course I'm a Great Depression kid. Then there was no other choice. In fact, when our tiny frame rent house went up in flames, seven kids were farmed out to relatives.

I drew Aunt Kate's house. Her husband was a guard at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary and he was always wagging home leftovers or some of the fresh vegetables the prisoners grew. We ate well.

Then along came World War II and rationing was the order of the day. Add two more kids and you see why my father was working from daylight to dark six days a week in his small dry cleaners.

I guess getting along with what you have is a life-learning experience. When I was back from Korea and later wed Helen Nix, I just assumed the good times were here.

It didn't take long to learn that Helen's watchword was frugality. We would have been more than prepared for today's sorry economy – gas over \$3 and groceries doubling in price.

As talk of recession and belt-tightening dominate headlines, I know exactly why today's young are devoid of thrift.

Credit cards, payday loans, high priced houses and clothes to die for have been the order of the day. Last year's savings rate was an astonishing .04%.

A study by the Journal of Consumer Research features an article, "Tightwads and Spendthrifts," showing people ages 18 to 40 are most likely to say they're spending beyond their "comfort range."

Not if there were more Helens around. I remember wandering through the mall and I'd spot a cute outfit and suggest she try it on.

"I will," she said, "when it goes on sale."

I remember being a good Boy Scout who stopped to help a motorist. His battery was acting up and he needed a shove.

"Sure," I said.

He waved his thanks and sped away but I had this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I pulled over. Sure enough, the front of our little Plymouth was mashed in.

"We need a new car," I said to Helen. "This one has about had it."

"OK," she smiled. "We'll start saving for a new car!"

There is an historical convergence eating young folk alive: cheaper goods, Internet shopping, longer store hours and easy credit.

I remember during the Eisenhower Recession my Dad commented, "What this



broader Sunni extremist community, raise resources, and ... recruit and indoctrinate operatives."

Far from making us safer, Iraq has made the world much more dangerous.

Iraqis has topped the list of asylum seekers in industrialized countries for the second year running, accounting for more than 10% of the total with 451,200 applications last year.

Iraqi asylum seekers in industrialized countries represent only 1% of the estimated 4.5 million Iraqis uprooted by the conflict.

Amnesty International reports that Iraq continues to be "one of the most dangerous countries in the world, with hundreds of Iraqi civilians killed every month."

Bush's failure to develop a logical exit strategy is one more failure of this tragic, incompetent administration.

Forget their differences, either Democrat would be a vast improvement over the blithering idiot who now holds that office.

The Republican candidate for president, John McCain, doesn't know the difference between Sunni and Shia yet he wants America to stay in Iraq "for a hundred years if that's what it takes."

He may be a war hero but he's out to lunch when it comes to knowing what he's talking about – on almost any subject, especially the economy.

McCain's support for the war is typical of Bush butt-kissing, a stance he enhanced when he decided to run again for president and needed a fund-raiser.

We are quick to measure the war in terms of American losses but consider a World Health Organization study that revealed 151,000 Iraqis were killed between the invasion March 20, 2003 and March 17 of this year.

The International Red Cross reports that millions have been displaced and millions more are without clean water or more than a few hours of electricity daily.

country needs is a damned good Depression."

He was referring to making do with what you have and saving money for that certain rainy day. Neighbor helping neighbor was taken for granted.

Will a little belt-tightening be a wake-up call for a spendthrift America? I doubt it. We've had it too good for too long while millions of Chinese are eating our industrial lunch. The mighty dollar no longer rules the world.

My sympathy lies with those seniors living on fixed incomes and interest from their investments. They didn't cause this economic mess, their kids did.

## Goodbye Myth

There it was – another anti-public education myth exploded. A new comprehensive study shows that children in Catholic schools make no more progress in reading in the early grades than similar students in public schools and make even less progress in math.

"I was actually surprised to find the results that Catholic schools are worse in mathematics," said Prof. Sean Reardon at Stanford University.

Reardon, the study's lead author and an associate professor of education and sociology, said, "But, if Catholic schools aren't subject to the same accountability requirements as public schools are, then they may not spend as much time on mathematics and literacy."

The new findings run counter to decades of reports suggesting that Catholic schools have an educational edge over public schools.

Most of that research has focused on Catholic high schools; few such studies have addressed Catholic schooling for younger students.

Nobody is higher on the fine job that Catholic schools do than I am. I'm tired of unfair comparisons.

When weighted for income, two-parent households and other demographics, public students do as well or better than their Catholic school counterparts.

The same was proven by researchers Christopher Lubienski and Sarah Thule Lubienski who leveled the playing field by taking into account family income, race and gender.

Catholic school 4th and 8th graders scored lower than public school students on national math exams.

Let's quit comparing apples to oranges. Our mantra: Public schools, public dollars. Private schools, private dollars.

# Heavy-Handed Republicans

## House Dems Still Can't Get Bills Heard

Are House Democrats and their bills receiving better treatment under new Republican Speaker Chris Benge?

Yes – but petty partisan politics too often still rule the day.

Norman Rep. Wallace Collins fought tirelessly for two years to get automatic external defibrillators into schools across Oklahoma, but he couldn't get his HB 1847 even heard in committee, primarily because he has a "D" next to his name.

It wasn't until Republican Rep. Doug Cox recently joined the fight that the life-saving initiative finally won House approval. Cox, an emergency room physician from Grove, knows all-too-well that health emergencies don't distinguish between Ds and Rs.

### COLLINS' SIN? BEATING BALKMAN

Some Republicans, though, weren't about to let Collins enjoy any legislative success. After all, he defeated their reactionary former colleague Thad Balkman two years ago.

Who cares if it could save the lives of young students? Or teachers? Or school visitors? For these knuckle-dragging partisans, it's all about political advantage.

Cox and Collins worked together to amend SB 923 to include Collins' proposal, named the Zachary Eckles-Luke Davis Automatic Defibrillator Act in memory of two young athletes who may have survived if the devices had been present at their schools.

"I believe we passed a bill that is good for all of Oklahomans," said Collins, "and it would not have been possible without the help of Dr. Cox."

### TOO CHEAP TO SAVE LIVES?

Of course, the Republican majority in the House couldn't find enough money to buy any defibrillators, estimated at about \$1,000 each. They will have to be financed through private donations or federal grants.

"When we tell people it's not worth \$1,000 to save a child's life, there's something wrong with that," said state Democratic Party Chairman Ivan Holmes.

Holmes recently called a news conference to spotlight several Democratic-sponsored bills torpedoed by the GOP majority despite being supported by a majority of Oklahomans.

At least three other Collins' measures – two involving mental health and a flood plains bill requested by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board and Oklahoma Flood Plain Management Board – also failed to get out of the House.

### JUST TO NAME A FEW ...

Holmes cited three other Democratic measures with what he called broad rank-and-file support statewide that didn't get hearings in the House:

- HB 2493 by state Rep. Wes Hilliard, D-Sulphur, that would have created a sales tax exemption on textbooks for college classes.
- HB 2841 by state Rep. Ryan Kiesel, D-Seminole, that would have established the Veterans Health Insurance program.
- HB 2655 by state Rep. Lucky Lamons, D-Tulsa, that would have provided adequate funding for the Ethics Commission.

Kiesel said that of the eight bills he could introduce under House rules, only one received a hearing. His veterans' health initiative will get a second chance

## Senate Staffers Win '08 Sunshine Award

Freedom of Information Oklahoma, a statewide organization actively supporting organizations and individuals working to open records or provide access to government, has honored the directors of the state Senate Communications Division and Information Systems Department with its annual Sunshine Award.

Malia Bennett has been the Senate's Director of Communications since 2003. The Communications Division works with all 48 members of the Senate and assists media and the public by providing information on the business of the Senate.

John Warren is the Director of the state Senate's Department of Information Systems. The department provides technical support to all members of the Senate and staff. Warren has been director of the department since 1998.

Given annually to a public official or governmental institution that has shown a commitment to freedom of information, the Sunshine Award was presented to Bennett and Warren by the organization for introducing a variety of innovations to give the public greater and more efficient access to the activities of the Senate.

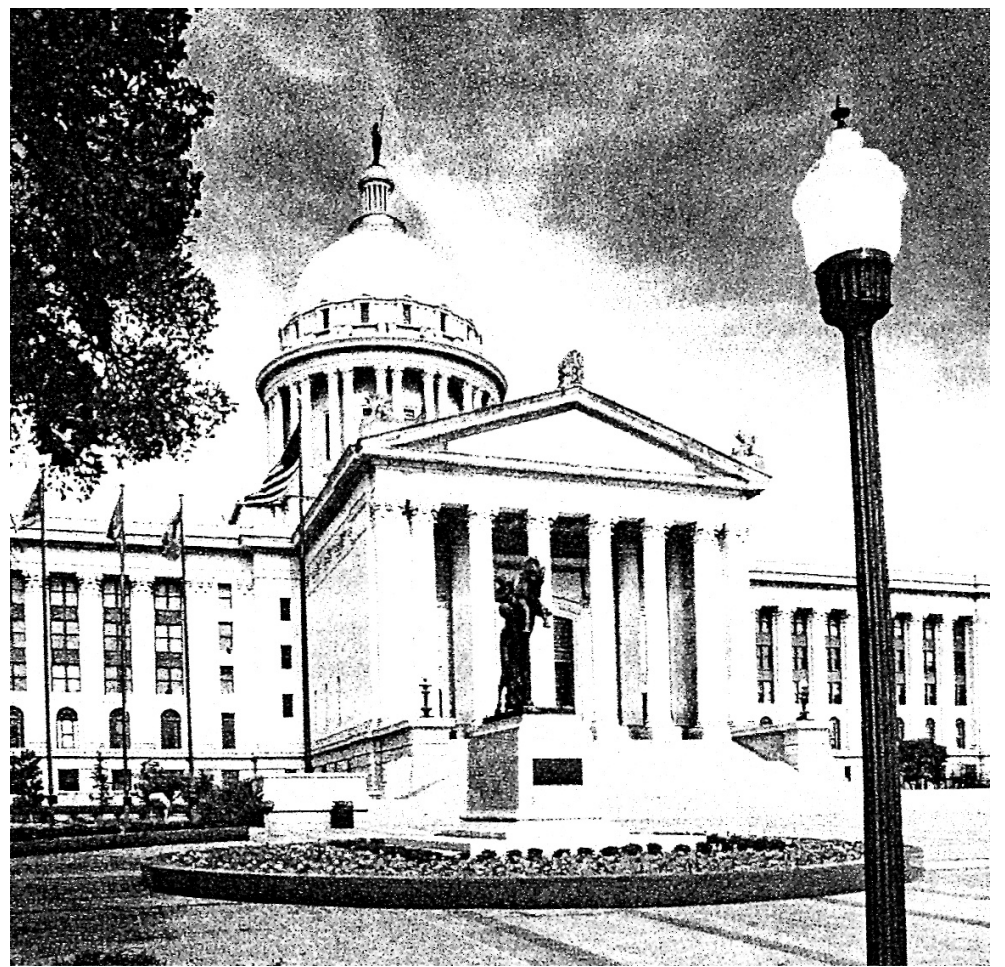
Sen. President Pro Tempore Mike Morgan said the award was an honor that both staff and senators can be proud of.

"We take great pride in making an emphasis on open and transparent government a priority at the Senate," said Morgan, D-Stillwater.

"Our communications and information systems departments have been proactive and innovative in developing a variety of features to provide the public with greater access to the business of the Senate. This is a well-deserved honor for our staff."

Senate Co-President Pro Tempore Glenn Coffee said he was pleased that Bennett and Warren had been selected for the honor.

"We are committed to providing the public with an accessible and open state government," said Coffee, R-OKC. "Our staff has also worked hard to further that



because the Senate approved and sent to the House a similar measure by state Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC.

### WHAT BIPARTISANSHIP?

"To hear people say we don't have a problem with partisanship in the House," said Holmes, "is simply not true."

Don't blame Benge entirely for the shenanigans.

Yes, he's a conservative Republican whose agenda often won't mesh with House Democrats. But he's also a genial leader who – unlike previous GOP speakers Todd Hiett and Lance Cargill – seems more than willing to let issues be heard, debated and voted on.

The problem: Benge is in the unenviable position of scrambling to hold together a fractured GOP coalition that often succumbs to the ravings of nearly three dozen of the most reactionary right-wingers ever to serve in elective office in Oklahoma.

### 2008 HOUSE ELECTIONS PIVOTAL

Short-term, the best-case scenario to neutralize the zealots is for Democrats and more moderate Republicans to join forces to advance common-sense legislation.

Long-term, Democrats have to erase the GOP's 57-44 House majority. Only seven Democratic pickups would swing the balance of power.

Holmes, who's put the state party back on sound financial footing, knows this well: He vows to find quality candidates for every House race this year.

Only a few thousand more Democratic votes, sprinkled strategically statewide in 2006, could have given Democrats a House majority.

goal, and we are proud that they have been honored with this award. The Senate will continue working to find new and innovative ways to provide the public with government information."

The organization lauded Bennett and Warren for their efforts to take advantage of new technologies to further the goal of providing those who cannot be at the Capitol with as much information as possible.

Since launching the Senate website in 1996, the two departments have worked together to offer digital audio to allow reporters from all media access to in-depth information and the legislative process.

Additionally, the Senate unveiled streaming video from the Senate Chamber and the two largest committee rooms so the public can observe and hear Senate business each day the body meets.

In 2005, the Senate made wireless Internet access available throughout all areas of the Senate. The group also praised the Senate for adding innovations such as the posting of all floor votes in real time, and access to all legislation, schedules and a number of publications.

Freedom of Information Oklahoma was founded in 1990 and continues its efforts to be an advocate for the public's right of access to government information. The group's 33-member board of directors includes attorneys, state and elected officials, journalists, educators and private citizens.

### THE WORLD ACCORDING TO CASEY

"A lot of people my age are dead at the present time."

"They say you can't do it, but sometimes that doesn't always work."

– Casey Stengel

# Subject: Driving In Tulsa Metro Area

If your Tulsa map is more than a few weeks old, throw it out and buy a new one. If you're in Broken Arrow and your map is one day old, then it is already obsolete.

Forget the traffic rules you learned elsewhere. Tulsa has its own version of traffic rules.

All directions start with "Get on Memorial" which has no beginning and no end. Everything in Tulsa is "just off Memorial."

The morning rush hour is from 6 to 10. The evening rush hour is from 3 to 7. Friday's rush hour starts Thursday morning.

If you actually stop at a yellow light, you will be rear ended, cussed out and possibly shot.

When you are the first one on the starting line, count to five when the light turns green before going to avoid crashing with all the drivers running the red light in cross-traffic.

## I-44 CONSTRUCTION A WAY OF LIFE

Construction on I-44 is a way of life and a permanent form of entertainment. All unexpected or strange sights are explained by the phrase, "Oh, we're in Jenks."

If someone actually has a turn signal on, it is probably a factory defect.

All old ladies with blue hair in Mercedes have the right of way. PERIOD.

I-44 is called the Skelly Bypass. No one has ever figured out what it bypasses.

State Highway 51 is either the Broken Arrow Expressway or the Keystone Expressway, depending on which way you're headed.

US 64 comes up Memorial from Bixby, joins 169 for a few miles, and then heads west with SH 51 towards Sand Springs.

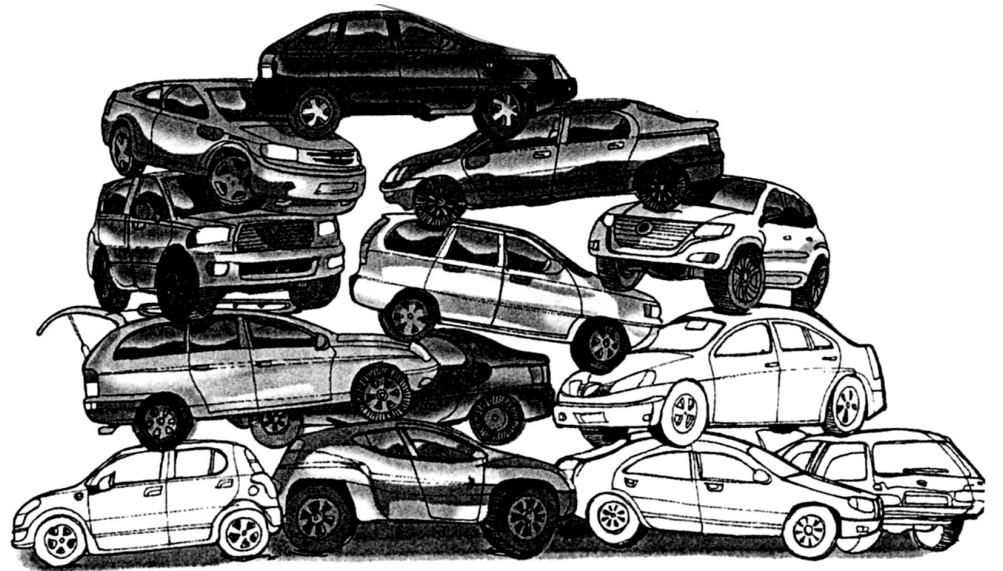
Several highways like the Creek Turnpike have no number. We don't understand it either.

## IF YOU FIND IT GIVE A CALL

Maps of Tulsa show an Interstate 444 in downtown Tulsa. If you find it let us know. The alleged I-444 is half of the inner-dispersal loop, which is not for the faint of heart.

Highway 169 in rush hour is the Tulsa equivalent of NASCAR. Just shut up and drive like the rest of us.

If you are trying to get into or out of Owasso on 169 during rush hour you



might as well place it in park. You are going to be there a while.

The minimum acceptable speed on the Broken Arrow Expressway is 85. Anything less is considered downright sissy.

If it's 100 degrees, Thanksgiving must be next weekend. If it's 10 degrees and snowing, it's homecoming at TU. If it's rained six inches in the last hour, and it is spring, it's opening day for the Drillers. If it is fall, the Tulsa State Fair is going on.

All amusement parks, stadiums, arenas, race tracks, airports, etc., are conveniently located as far away from EVERYTHING as possible so as to allow for ample parking on grassy areas.

Don't bother trying to avoid the potholes. If you swerve to miss one, you will hit two larger ones on the other side and heaven knows who may still be left in them.

With these simple rules in mind, you are now ready to drive in Tulsa.

Now, with all this going on, the mayor wants more sales tax to spend on wider bike paths or some such out of touch, elitist nonsense at the River Parks, which, by the way, is on Riverside Drive, where the only time you'll see anyone just doing 60 is if they are backing up.

Please try to keep up or get out of the way ... for your own sake.

- Forwarded by LeAnn Troy

## Task Force Proposed

# Most Female Inmates Suffer Mental Illness

The state Senate has approved a bill that would establish a task force to study state agency roles and responsibilities to help ensure that mentally ill women who have been incarcerated are successfully reintegrated into society.

Sen. Connie Johnson, D-OKC, author of Senate Bill 1959, explained that with Oklahoma leading the nation in the incarceration of women, the state must begin treating the cause rather than the symptoms.

"In order for us to correct this problem, we have to look at ways to reduce recidivism, to treat the causes that ultimately lead to incarceration and make sure our agencies are working to ensure that these women have every opportunity to lead productive lives," said Johnson.

"It's been said that our prisons are the state's largest mental hospitals, but unfortunately the kind of treatment needed in these facilities is largely inadequate. The resulting cycle of recidivism has cost our state dearly."

## IT WOULD BE A JOINT EFFORT

Johnson said the task force would be led by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services along with the Department of Corrections.

The two agencies will work together with the 15-member task force to review current initiatives and plan future efforts to address the needs of mentally ill women who have been incarcerated.

According to statistics from the Department of Corrections, Oklahoma's incarceration rate ranks first nationally for females and fourth for males.

Of the 25,120 prisoners currently in Oklahoma correctional facilities, 2,587 are women. Of those women, 60% suffer from some form of mental illness.

"This issue is about the high costs of incarceration to our state and its cost to our families and communities," Johnson said. "If we don't give women the treatment and tools necessary to successfully re-enter society, this problem will not fix itself.

"I'm confident this task force can develop a plan that is fair to all and that can make a difference in the lives of the many women and families who aren't getting the help they so desperately need and deserve."

## MAKEUP OF THE TASK FORCE

In addition to the director of the Department of Corrections and the Commissioner of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, task force members will include four members of the Legislature; representatives from the Department of Rehabilitation Services; the Department of Human Services; the Oklahoma Health Care Authority and a representative from Workforce Oklahoma.

A woman who suffers from mental illness and has been incarcerated will also be appointed to the task force. If approved by the Legislature, the task force will hold its first meeting on or before Sept. 1.

"This bill is very much a collaborative effort between the Legislature, state agencies, mental health advocacy groups and mental health consumers," Johnson

son said.

"We chose to address this targeted group of mentally ill women with a goal of developing a model that can be applied to the larger community of people with mental illness who are presently housed in correctional facilities."

## A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN NEEDED

Rita Cooksey, Administrative Specialist for Female Offender Management with the Department of Corrections, said there is a great need for the state to begin addressing this issue with a comprehensive plan.

"All of our bed space has been taken and a large percentage of these women have been diagnosed with some form of mental illness," she said.

"The pathways to incarceration with men and women are different and it's often some form of trauma or mental illness that leads women to correctional facilities.

"Great strides have been taken toward addressing the issue but it's time for our state to take a larger leap with this collaborative effort and we're very excited about it."

Johnson said the task force could put Oklahoma at the national forefront in addressing issues related to mental illness and incarceration.

"On the horizon, Oklahoma stands to be on the cutting edge for consideration when initiatives such as the Second Chance Act, signed by the President, are implemented," Johnson said. "This task force is definitely a move in the right direction for our state."

## NOTEWORTHY

Two important reminders as Tax Day 2008 approaches:

- State Treasurer Scott Meacham urges Oklahomans to open or add to an Oklahoma College Savings Plan by April 15 in order to receive a 2007 Oklahoma state income tax deduction. Oklahoma families can deduct up to \$20,000 a year if married filing jointly or \$10,000 if filing as a single taxpayer. Moreover, earnings in an Oklahoma College Savings Plan account are federal and Oklahoma income tax free, and qualified withdrawals are permanently free from Oklahoma state and federal income tax. To open an account with as little as \$100, call 877.654.7284 or visit [www.ok4saving.org](http://www.ok4saving.org).

- Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma Inc. is offering help to seniors with questions about their special tax rebates from the federal government. Richard J. Goralewicz, staff attorney for Legal Aid's Senior Law Project, says only seniors who file a 2007 return will receive the rebate. He urges seniors to be aware of possible identity-theft scams linked to the one-time rebate and of possible problems if they choose to receive the rebates via direct deposit. Goralewicz may be reached at 405.488.6812.

# Oklahoma's Obesity Extracting High Price

By Doug Walton

Serious problems don't always require complicated solutions. In a state ranked second in deaths due to cardiovascular disease and last in the percentage of adults eating five or more fruits or vegetables a day, it's not very difficult to conclude that if Oklahomans ate better, they would be healthier.

As seen in recent headlines, obesity has become a national epidemic. In Oklahoma, over one third of adults are overweight, and the percentage of those who are obese has more than doubled since 1990, up from 11% to 24% of all adults. [Centers for Disease Control]

The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight has also significantly increased over the past few decades.

## OBESITY COMES WITH A HUGE COST

With obesity comes a long list of associated physical and emotional side effects, on top of increased risks for life threatening and disabling diseases.

Researchers at the National Institutes of Health report that overweight and obesity are responsible for a two to three fold increase in the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Likewise, obesity has been shown to raise the risk of diabetes by as much as five times, as was evident between 1994 and 2003, when rates of diabetes doubled in Oklahoma.

Other serious chronic diseases besides heart disease and diabetes have also been linked to obesity and poor diets.

## THE LINK TO CANCER VERIFIED

According to the American Cancer Society, "about one third of the cancer deaths that occur in the U.S. each year are due to nutrition and physical activity factors, including excess weight."

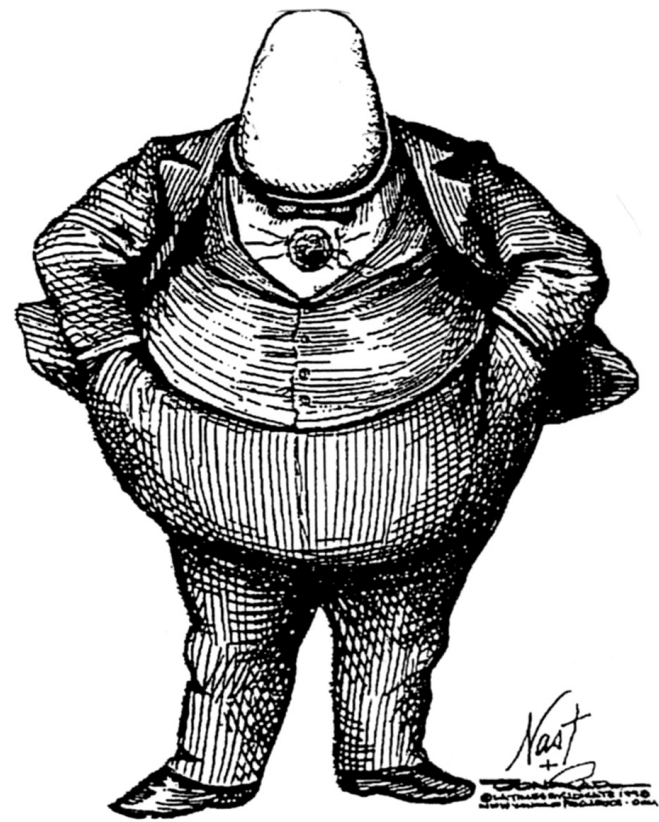
While Oklahomans of all ages and income levels are victims of poor diets and sedentary lifestyles, an even higher prevalence of chronic illness is found within some ethnic minorities.

Rates of diabetes and obesity are nearly twice as high in Native Americans, and deaths from heart disease are 20% higher in African-Americans, compared to all Oklahomans.

Also, the death rate from colorectal cancer among African-American Oklahomans is nearly twice that of their white counterparts.

## PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Obesity and diet-related illnesses place a huge burden on the state's health care system. They also significantly impact the productivity and quality of life for



many Oklahoma families.

Studies cited in the journal Obesity Research found that obese adults have 36% higher average medical expenditures compared with those of normal weight adults.

In 2003, the total annual medical costs of obesity in Oklahoma were estimated to be \$854 million, with approximately 45% of these costs borne by Medicare and Medicaid.

The annual costs of cardiovascular disease and lost productivity from death and disability are estimated at nearly \$5 billion in Oklahoma.

These heavy financial tolls are passed on to families through ever increasing health care prices and insurance premiums, as well as through higher taxes to offset government health programs.

Furthermore, as family members become consumed with caring for their loved ones, their own personal productivity at work and in their communities is diminished.

In a State of the State's Health Report, the Oklahoma State Board of Health concludes, "Unless we can reverse the obesity epidemic, especially among our youth, our healthcare system will be strained to the breaking point as the population ages."

— Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

## A Long Muzzled Watchdog Threatens To Bite

Only time will tell whether the sorriest act of the 2008 Legislature was the death of legislation to adequately fund the Oklahoma Ethics Commission.

State Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, said lawmakers missed the opportunity recently to back their ethics-reform rhetoric with actual funding.

"The Oklahoma House of Representatives had the opportunity to fully fund the state Ethics Commission for the first time in state history," said Reynolds.

"Unfortunately, it appears the House is paying lip service to the idea of ethics reform instead of real service. The Ethics Commission cannot monitor and protect the integrity of our campaign finance system unless the agency is given a budget that will allow them to truly investigate complaints."

The situation is so dire that commission members are on the verge of suing lawmakers in a desperate attempt to force them to meet their constitutional obligations to provide the agency adequate funding.

The state Constitution mandates that "the Ethics Commission shall receive an annual appropriation by the Legislature sufficient to enable it to perform its duties."

How bad are things at the agency? Despite an enormous workload, it has the budget for only one investigator. It is so broke it has been reduced to borrowing paper from other agencies. And its two staff attorneys earn considerably less than many of the top aides to House and Senate leaders.

Long a proponent of a stronger, more independent commission, Reynolds offered a floor amendment that would have significantly increased the watchdog agency's budget to roughly \$900,000 per year. The amendment was defeated twice.

A similar amendment offered by state Rep. Lucky Lamons, D-Tulsa, was also defeated twice.

The "action on the House floor was a setback, but it won't be the last word on ethics reform," Reynolds said. "I will continue this fight throughout the legislative session."

Both Republican and Democratic leaders have refused for years to adequately fund the commission. Why? Obviously they want to block dirty money prosecutions.

## 439 State Teachers Nationally Certified

By Sandy Garrett

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards ranks Oklahoma teachers sixth in the nation in the number of its teachers who became National Board Certified in 2007.

The state is ninth in the nation in the total number of teachers with the certification – the profession's gold standard. National board certification for an elementary or secondary educator is the most prestigious teaching credential that can be achieved.

The process is voluntary but rigorous, taking one to several years to complete. Applicants must pass several assessments, meet tough standards, be formally evaluated and submit to peer review.

The result is good teachers becoming even better and serving as role models of excellence for their colleagues. Oklahoma's progress in the number of National Board Certified Teachers [NBCTs] has been dramatic.

### IT WAS A 56% ONE YEAR GAIN!

Consider that with 439 new NBCTs in 2007, we had a 56%, one-year gain. The

state now is among only a handful of states with about 5% of its teaching force being nationally certified.

The tremendous growth in the number of teachers seeking national certification is thanks in large measure to state-funded scholarships and a \$5,000 annual bonus for all teachers who hold the certification and work full-time in public schools.

Increasing the numbers of NBCTs is good for the state. Of the total number of Oklahoma NBCTs, 58% work in high-poverty schools and, compared to most states, Oklahoma has a high poverty rate.

Research indicates NBCTs positively impact student achievement, especially if they work in high-poverty schools. Oklahoma NBCTs are blazing trails, setting high standards for themselves and motivating their peers and students to do the same.

We hope more and more of our educators will follow their inspiring lead!

— The author is state Superintendent of Public Instruction

## PUBLIC FORUM

# ***Kern Forgets To 'Love Neighbor As Self'***

***By Loyce Newton-Edwards***

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once observed that, "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them."

As a member of the clergy, and a wife, mother and grandmother myself, I don't just understand Archbishop Tutu's words ... I feel them in my core, too.

Every member of our family is precious, and no member of God's family should ever be dismissed, disrespected or disdained simply because of who they are.

That is why so many of us who believe in family values and the dignity of all our children were so concerned about recent remarks about the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community from Rep. Sally Kern.

Indeed, those of us who value every member of our family, and believe in our country's promise of equality, grieved to hear a public servant so dismissively malign our loved ones.

### **KERN'S VITRIOLIC ATTACK**

By now, most Oklahomans know that, while speaking recently to a group of constituents from her district, Kern described the gay community as "the biggest threat our nation has, even more so than terrorism" and compared lesbian and gay Americans to a "cancer" that will "destroy this nation."

Her shrill rhetoric, however, should not divert our attention from what's really at stake in this important conversation.

When Oklahoma City supporters of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG] recently sat down with Kern, we reminded her of just how close to home her comments hit.

Indeed, the Urban Institute reports that nearly 10,000 gay Oklahomans have served in our armed forces, fighting terrorism and working to keep all of us – including Kern – safe and secure.

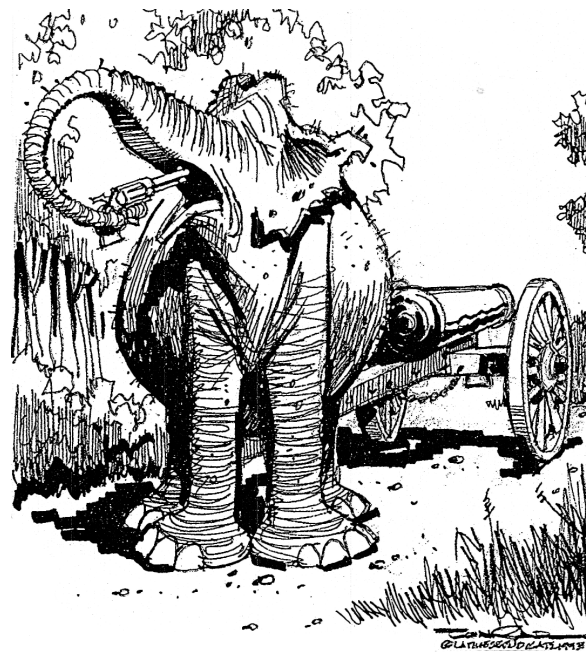
Oklahoma is home to more than 89,500 GLBT citizens, and approximately 4,000 children are living in loving homes headed by same-sex couples in our state.

None of them should be set aside because of who they are, and no public servant should leave our families behind.

### **KERN'S MISPLACED PRIORITIES**

As a person of faith, and a member of the clergy, I am concerned that Rep. Kern has forgotten the adage of "love thy neighbor as thyself."

As a citizen of Oklahoma, I am troubled that she has seemingly prioritized at-



tacking our families over tackling the many challenges our state faces.

Surely, Kern would be better served – as would her constituents – if she focused her energies on fighting crime, strengthening the economy and working to improve our schools.

It is simply unacceptable that she has instead decided to fight families and perpetuate discrimination.

### **KERN'S ATTACKS INTENSIFY**

Kern has, so far, steadfastly refused to step back from her comments, and has even stepped up her attacks on our families. And now, she has shut down the dialogue entirely, refusing any further conversations with PFLAG or our families.

Meanwhile, all we – the parents, families and friends of lesbian and gay Oklahomans – are asking is that Kern keep her oath to represent and speak for all of her constituents, regardless of who they love.

Surely, that does not mean we have asked too much.

There are so many issues that challenge and concern our families. Our elected leaders should not try to divert attention from those important priorities by advancing prejudice in our community.

As mothers, fathers and friends of loved ones who are lesbian and gay, we believe family values demand that Kern apologize. And as the people of Oklahoma, we send an unmistakable message that our communities deserve better from those elected to defend our freedoms.

Archbishop Tutu is right: Our families are God's gift to us ... we just wish Sally Kern would see them as a gift, too.

– The author is Oklahoma City chapter president of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG] and serves as assistant pastor at Church of the Open Arms, United Church of Christ in Oklahoma City.

# ***Kern Makes Oklahoma Laughingstock***

***By Ted Eudy***

An Open Letter to Rep. Sally Kern:

It was another sad day for Oklahoma when you again made a good state the laughingstock of the nation.

You, Rep. Kern, have done some very shameful things for Oklahomans with your closeted remarks to fellow Republicans!

It was in part because of know-nothings like you, representing my partner and me in government, that we took our good investments and incomes and substantial taxes to another, more open-minded, state.

The sinister part of your remarks was not that you spoke your mind about gay people, but that you shamefully tried hiding behind our Constitution's First Amendment to spew hatred and falsehoods while posturing yourself as a representative of the people of Oklahoma!

Approximately 10% of your constituency is gay. As a representative of the people, one would think you capable of representing all your constituency and shielding them from potential harm, not causing harm. In this arena, Rep. Kern, you have failed miserably!

Be reminded you are a representative in a democratic republic, not a theocracy.

The one positive thing that can come from your exposure is that voters can see the fool they have elected and not make the same mistake again.

If they do, then Oklahomans deserve what they get and you can continue making yourself, and them, the laughingstock of America.

It will make for sad entertainment.

– The author is a veterinarian in Santa Fe, N.M.

# ***A School Bus Driver Pleads For Seat Belts***

***By Everett J. Sweeney***

In Indiana recently, another school bus was involved in a collision and overturned, resulting in injuries to children. This is especially alarming because Indiana, like Oklahoma, does not require seat belts for children on school buses.

We do have mandatory seat belt laws for children in automobiles, but not school buses.

Only six states require seat belts on school buses: New York, New Jersey, California, Florida, Texas and Louisiana. These states, like Texas, passed seat belt legislation after accidents that resulted in death, dismemberment and permanently crippling injuries.

In 2007 a rollover school bus accident occurred in Beaumont, TX, resulting in two deaths and several serious injuries to soccer players. The Texas Legislature passed a new law that provides that each new school bus purchased after Sept. 10, 2010 must be equipped with lap and shoulder belts.

We in Oklahoma should consider these wake-up calls and do something to protect our kids.

Seat belts prevent injuries, especially in rollovers and side-impact collisions. It would also keep children in their seats, which would greatly reduce distractions to school bus drivers. Distractions are common on school buses that commonly transport in excess of 50 children, and are the No. 1 cause of school bus accidents.

Seat belts on school buses are supported by the American Medical Association,

the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons, the American College of Preventive Medicine, Physicians for Automotive Safety, the National Coalition for School Bus Safety, and the National PTA.

European Union countries and Australia have required lap and shoulder belts in school buses for over a decade.

Oklahoma needs legislation for seat belts on school buses now. It will save lives.

– The author, a school bus driver and an attorney, lives in Norman

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## BOOKS

# Bush's Team Justice: Hapless, Not Heavy

By Peter J. Spiro

### BUSH'S LAW

*The Remaking Of American Justice*

By Eric Lichtblau

Pantheon Books

384 pages, \$26.95

Back in another world, my undergraduate days in the early 1980's, a roommate of mine loved the tidbit [gleaned from my Washington childhood] that if you uttered certain words on a long-distance call, a transcript might end up on the desk of some spy catcher at the National Security Agency.

"Hey, Pete, got those I ... C ... B ... M's for me today?" became a sort of punch line. "The briefcase with cash will be in the phone booth!"

I doubt college kids today are playing the same sort of game, just as the rest of us know better than to joke about explosives in front of TSA inspectors. You might actually get yourself in trouble.

But that's perhaps the extent of it. For all the talk of post-9/11 government repression, everyday constraints on most of us are pretty minimal. Even those who speak out against the Bush administration don't have much to fear.

### WASHINGTON ENFORCERS INCOMPETENT

Given their druthers, the enforcers in Washington would have muffled all dissent and locked down every suspect, no matter how unlikely. If only they'd been competent. If only the rest of us had given way. And therein lies the challenge for New York Times reporter Eric Lichtblau in his new book.

Conventional wisdom has it that the Bush administration has trampled civil liberties at every turn, and that's clearly the premise going in. At the back end, however, one is left confident that the law has stood up pretty well.

*Bush's Law* presents a genre problem: Is it tragedy? Horror? Comedy? Farce? That's not to ignore the bodies, metaphorical and otherwise, that mark the passage of the Bush years.

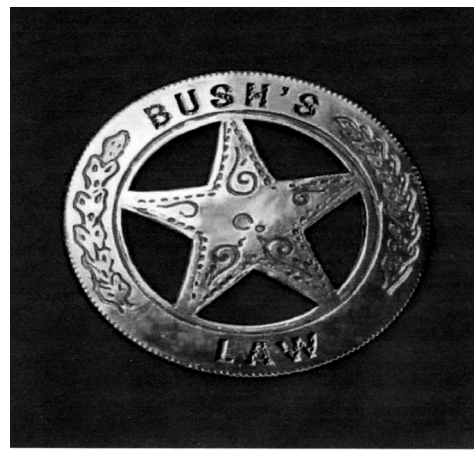
### LONG LIST OF INJUSTICES

Some people have suffered injustice, and Lichtblau tells their stories well: the thousand or so noncitizen Middle Easterners rounded up in the days immediately following 9/11 on minor immigration violations who faced lengthy detentions incommunicado without any due process, none of whom shown to have any connection to terrorism; the veteran FBI analyst driven to suicide by middle-of-the-night CYA calls relating to President Bush's morning intelligence briefing, not to mention the many whose government careers were derailed because they tried to blow the whistle; the young Portland lawyer, Brandon Mayfield, who had the misfortune to have his fingerprints mistakenly traced from a baggie of fuses used in the 2004 Madrid bombings and to be a Muslim convert.

Mayfield had his life turned upside down. But the error was acknowledged soon enough, and he got a \$2 million settlement for his troubles.

The noncitizen detainees were eventually all released. Others may not have been adequately compensated, but that kind of accident may be within life's standard deviation.

Which leaves the centerpiece of Lichtblau's "remaking": the expanded use of surveillance by the National Security Agency to include communications with a



THE REMAKING OF AMERICAN JUSTICE

ERIC LICHTBLAU

domestic component.

### HOW NSA CHANGED AFTER 9/11

Before 9/11, the NSA was mostly a spy-to-spy operation, on U.S. soil anyway, targeting foreign diplomatic communications. After the WTC attacks, Mr. Bush expanded the agency's brief to include the warrantless intercept of any international communication, even if ordinary Americans were on both ends of the line.

As if that weren't bad enough, the expanded eavesdropping program was adopted on an extremely close-hold basis. Only a very few were kept in the loop, not including, for instance, the No. 2 official at the Justice Department [who was otherwise responsible for signing off on all wiretaps]. The administration also informed a few cowed members of Congress and one lone federal judge.

They all kept mum in the face of the administration's wartime logics. Only Sen. Jay Rockefeller registered his objections in writing.

Even the Times knuckled under to the secrecy imperative, sitting on the news for more than a year. When the story did break, in December 2005, Lichtblau shared the byline with intelligence affairs reporter James Risen, and *Bush's Law* coughs up a behind-the-scenes account of the decision to spike and then unspike the eavesdropping scoop.

### INCOMPETENCE ON DISPLAY

The book is a taut read, and the author's strong reportorial skills are on display throughout. The problem is with the boundaries of his beat. Officials at the Justice Department come across as more hapless than heavy.

Some of it's funny, like the "Pizza Hut leads," so-called because communication dots came always to connect with the pizza deliveryman; or the head of FBI counterterrorism who can't tell the difference between Shia and Sunni Islam.

There aren't really any heroes here. A few mid-level officials pushed back on the more extreme elements of administration policy [some of them unlikely, such as INS commissioner James Ziglar], and even Attorney General John Ashcroft had his limits.

But no one has the stamina, the will or the power to bring basic constitutional precepts back into play. There isn't anyone on either side of the moral aisle sufficiently engaging to carry the narrative.

The real brutes are offstage – mostly at the White House, in the form of Dick Cheney and his hidden hand David Addington – as are the real injustices, in places like Guantánamo, Bagram and Abu Ghraib.

It's our loss that Eric Lichtblau hasn't been put on those trails, too.

– Peter J. Spiro teaches law at Temple University and is author of *Beyond Citizenship: American Identity After Globalization*

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# Robertson's Ideology Mirrored Today's GOP

By Alvena Bieri

### ALICE ROBERTSON

*Congresswoman From Oklahoma*

By Reba Collins and Bob Burke

Oklahoma Heritage Association

160 pages, Out of Print

Alice Robertson is not a very well known Oklahoman.

Several years ago Reba Collins and Bob Burke put together a little biography, a good deal of which is quotes from her.

The book includes a preface by another Republican, Mary Fallin, written when she was lieutenant governor.

Elected in 1920 to Congress, Robertson was from Muskogee, the granddaughter of the Cherokee Samuel Worcester. In those days Republicans were very active on all levels of government, despite great problems in racial discrimination and prejudice against women as well.

Alice Robertson was born in 1854 in the Creek nation. Her maternal grandparents were Presbyterian missionaries who worked first in Tennessee and Georgia, and after much hardship, ended up at Park Hill near Tahlequah. Many of her family were highly-educated, and her father was instrumental in getting a printing press to the Cherokees.

The biographers have this interesting sentence about her: "Alice Robertson always knew that she was not a Democrat." Why? Because President Andrew Jackson, a Democrat, had "removed" the Five Tribes from their homes and property in the southern states and sent them to Oklahoma.

Alice too was interested in intellectual matters of all kinds. She went to Elmira College in New York and was associated with many of the students at Carlisle School in Pennsylvania. She was determined to be a good teacher and missionary and to "make a difference." She tried in her teaching career to raise standards in Indian schools. And in the meantime, she was able to develop many ideas about education and politics on her trips to the east.

In fact, she started an Oklahoma school called Minerva and taught English and history there for several years. First called Kendall College, named for its benefactor, it turned into the University of Tulsa! In 1900 she was beginning to get invitations to make commencement addresses. She knew President Teddy Roosevelt, and was appointed postmaster at Muskogee.

She seemed to be both an ambitious politician and a good businesswoman. We see pictures of a cafeteria she started in Muskogee. She also found time to volunteer at the veterans hospital, using her skills as a nurses' aide.

Robertson decided to run for Congress and was elected November 2, 1920 by 209 votes. American women had just been guaranteed the vote in August of that year.

The rest of her story as a politician – she served just one term – is rather ironic by our standards of today. She did not support the League of Nations, perhaps because she did not like President Wilson. She didn't support the League of Women Voters, either. And she was absolutely against contraception. Ironies abound.

The rest of the book is a compilation of her writings and letters.

– The author lives in Stillwater

# Are Democrats Risking A McCain Presidency?

## Obama-Clinton Zealotry Is Political Suicide

By Susan Estrich

It was bound to happen, I suppose, even if everyone knows better. The fact that all you accomplish when you cut off your nose is to spite your face doesn't stop people from doing it every day. So why should Democrats be different?

The recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll confirms the worst fears of Democrats: That what should be a Democratic year could become a Republican one.

For the second time in a row, the pollsters have found that roughly 20% of Clinton's supporters and, yes, 20% of Obama's say they will support Republican John McCain if the Democrat who isn't their first choice ends up running against him.

Twenty percent of the Democratic base voting for McCain? The pollsters call it "some hardening of feelings among some of the most core supporters of both Democrats."

I have a different name for it: political suicide.

### DEMOCRATS COULD BLOW IT

This is how a Democrat could lose an election after eight years of a Republican administration that has taken the economy into recession, the country into an unpopular, costly and dubious war, and bailed out Bear Stearns instead of the thousands of hard-working Americans who were taken advantage of by subprime lenders and are now losing their homes and their life savings.

This is how Democrats could end up snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

A hard fought campaign for the nomination is bound to leave some bruises. That's why the conventional wisdom that the earlier you wrap up a nomination the more it's worth holds true more often than not.

But the fight between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, whatever it is, is most definitely NOT an ideological battle, NOT a fight for the proverbial "heart and soul" of the Democratic party, NOT a choice between two people who disagree with each other on a wide range of issues. They don't.

### CLINTON, OBAMA ON SAME SIDE

When it comes to the war in Iraq, Clinton and Obama are on one side, and McCain is on the other. When it comes to abortion, Clinton and Obama are on one side, and McCain is on the other. When it comes to access to health care or support for education or women's rights or civil rights, the reality is that Clinton and Obama are on one side and McCain is on the other.

When you think about who they will appoint to high office, to the Cabinet and the courts and the Supreme Court of the United States, the bottom line is that Clinton and Obama will be looking at precisely the same pool of people, and McCain will be looking at an entirely different one.

Clinton and Obama will appoint Justices who share the values of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, and McCain will appoint those who share the values of Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas.

According to the polls, Obama's supporters right now dislike Clinton even more than Clinton's dislike Obama. Among Obama voters, Clinton's disapproval rating is a significant 43%; among Clinton voters, Obama is viewed negatively by 29%.

What that suggests is trouble on all sides.

### WILL HARD FEELINGS SUBSIDE?

Some of those hard feelings are likely to fade once the nomination is decided.

But given how far off that day could be, the danger is that the negative views could get more widespread and more entrenched, that things could get worse before they get better.

Could McCain win?

He could, if enough Democrats forget that in the end policy should count more than personality, and the real fight is for the country's future and not the party's crown.

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## Beginning Of A Minister

After a church service on Sunday morning, a young boy suddenly announced to his mother, "Mom, I've decided to become a minister when I grow up."

"That's OK with us, but what made you decide that?"

"Well," said the little boy, "I have to go to church on Sunday anyway, and I figure it will be more fun to stand up and yell, than to sit and listen."

## Relax: Plenty Of Time For Bruises To Heal

By Froma Harrop

If the Democratic contest lasts until the convention in late August, so what?

That leaves two months for Democrats to "coalesce" around their candidate and fight the Republican. And even that shorter time frame will seem a month too long for voters.

So why not go the nine innings? The great American pastime is not judged by time but by action in the field. That's how the game is played.

Polls say most ordinary Democrats want more primaries. But Democratic leaders – not coincidentally, Barack Obama's backers – say Hillary Clinton must drop out for the good of party. She has no chance of winning the nomination.

Wrong and wrong. Obama's support among independents seems to be weakening – largely because of the Rev. Wright controversy. That Obama tolerated his pastor's highly offensive remarks for two decades is a problem that will not go away, whatever the polls say.

### MCCAIN STOUT FOE

Republican John McCain would be a formidable foe for either Democrat. But his appeal to the sort of moderates who would otherwise support Clinton adds to Hillary's argument that she'd be the stronger Democrat in November. Some 28% of her backers say they'd vote for McCain if she loses.

As for Clinton's odds to nail the nomination, they're not great – but also not nil. Democrats in Pennsylvania, Indiana, North Carolina and seven other states have yet to vote.

If she wins big in those places – and the Florida and Michigan primaries

are somehow redone – she could emerge with most of the popular vote after all. And even if she doesn't, the super-delegates could give her the margin she needs – especially if momentum turns in her favor. [Insisting that super-delegates rubber stamp the voters makes no sense. Why have them?]

### OBAMA PLAYS INEVITABILITY CARD

Obama's surrogates are nonetheless playing the inevitability card. The race for the nomination is over, they say, so let's move on.

Long ago, Clinton's campaign made much the same pitch. It wasn't attractive then, and it's not attractive now. Inevitability talk is designed to demoralize challengers but comes off as dismissive.

The Obama camp knows that and so employs a two-faced strategy. It sends out high-profile supporters to chant that Clinton can't win and is selfish for hanging in. Then Obama sails in with his smooth "Clinton can stay in the race as long as she wants" and a patronizing "I think that she should be able to compete and her supporters should be able to support her for as long as they are willing or able."

News flash: No one asked him.

The game's not over 'til it's over. And it's not over until Clinton says it is – or the convention chooses someone. Or Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean gets the superdelegates to designate a clear winner.

### SNIPING INTO AUGUST DAMAGES DEMS?

If the game were truly over, then Obama's helpers wouldn't care whether Hillary stayed in the race or not. Their candidate would be making leisured and genial appearances at events – as McCain did once it became obvious that Mike Huckabee was no longer a serious threat.

Party elders say letting the Democratic candidates snipe at one another through August would hurt their nominee's chances in the general election. Perhaps. But ending the contest earlier would also extend the time Republicans have a Democrat to attack.

When a ball game reaches the eighth inning, and one side is way behind, the league doesn't say: "Team X has no chance of winning. Time to declare a victor."

When the game goes into extra innings, and people are getting tired, Americans know what to do: Go into the kitchen and make a sandwich. Be patient. It will play out.

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# A Medical Error? Sure, And Apologize

By Sandeep Jauhar

One morning not long ago, I got a call from the emergency room at my hospital. A young man – an intern who had been on rounds that morning – had been admitted with chest pains. Could I come to evaluate him?

He was 30, a Pakistani man with a long face and a disconnected look, which I attributed to anxiety. I asked him about the pain. It had started after dinner the night before, lasting about 10 minutes.

He had slept comfortably, but the pain recurred while he was walking to the bus stop that morning, persisting almost an hour.

It was a dense pressure in the center of his chest. To be on the safe side, he had decided to leave rounds and come to the E.R.

## NO TRADITIONAL RISK FACTORS

His blood tests were normal, as was his first electrocardiogram. He had none of the traditional risk factors for heart disease.

I suspected he was suffering from acute pericarditis, a usually benign inflammation of the membrane around the heart often treated with over-the-counter anti-inflammatory drugs.

Characteristic of pericarditis, the pain worsened when he took a deep breath. I told him that if blood tests in six hours were normal, we would send him home. I joked that there were easier ways to get out of internship duty.

Later that morning, I got a call from an E.R. physician informing me that my patient's pain had resolved completely after he took ibuprofen, further confirming the diagnosis of pericarditis.

## WAITING FOR NEXT SET OF TESTS

For a moment I considered sending him home right then, but I decided to wait until the next set of blood tests was complete.

Just before leaving the hospital that evening, I ran into a physicians' assistant. He told me that my patient's subsequent blood tests showed evidence of minor cardiac muscle damage.

Though surprised, I quickly explained that the problem was probably myopericarditis, where inflammation of the surrounding membrane can partially involve the heart muscle.

He asked me whether the young doctor should have an angiogram to rule out artery blockages. It was late; I told him that any work-up could wait until morning.

## NO CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE

I assured him that a 30-year-old with no risk factors did not have coronary artery disease. I told him to draw more enzymes and to order a cardiac ultrasound



for the morning, and to call me at home if there were problems.

My patient had chest pains through the night. Doctors who were called to see him attributed them to myopericarditis, the diagnosis written in the chart.

Further blood tests showed evidence of continuing heart muscle injury. An EKG the following morning showed nonspecific signs consistent with a heart attack.

Though I still doubted that he had coronary disease, I reluctantly sent him to the cardiac catheterization lab for an angiogram.

I received a call about an hour later asking me to come over to the lab. When I arrived, the angiogram was playing on a computer screen. It showed a complete blockage of the left anterior descending artery, the so-called widow-maker lesion.

## OPENED WITH A BALLOON AND STENT

The artery looked like a lobster tail, unnaturally terminating after several centimeters. Within minutes, the blockage was opened with a balloon and a stent.

Afterward, heat rose to my face as colleagues wandered in to inquire about what was going on. "How could we have missed this?" I asked aloud. I was well aware of the disturbing prevalence of heart disease in South Asians, whose risk is up to four times that of other ethnic groups.

I knew that heart attacks in this population often occurred in men under 40, who often do not exhibit classic coronary risk factors. I knew all this, but somehow my mind had suffered a block.

## COLLEAGUES EXPRESS SYMPATHY

"Don't beat yourself up," a colleague said sympathetically. "Every doctor I know would have done the same thing." Another told me that it was his policy to "cath" almost anyone who came to the E.R. complaining of chest pains.

See APOLOGIZE Page 13

# Old Myth, New Reality For Gun Rights?

By Danny M. Adkison

The Supreme Court recently heard oral arguments over a case that may be one of the most watched cases of this current court. It deals with the Second Amendment: the right to keep and bear arms.

An interesting transformation has occurred. What that amendment meant used to be settled by law schools perennial example of the rational prudent person. Reading in the popular press about the recent case, however, one would conclude that the Supreme Court is breaking new ground.

It isn't. The law in this area has been settled for nearly 70 years.

Those who don't like that meaning have done a good job of portraying the issue as one that is presently unsettled. Here are the facts.

## NO TRANSPORTING ACROSS STATE LINES

In 1934 Congress passed a law making it a crime to transport certain types of weapons across state lines. It asserted the authority to do this based on the Constitution's provision allowing Congress to regulate commerce among the states [Article I, Section 8, Clause 3].

Shortly after this, Jack Miller and Frank Layton departed from Claremore, OK, headed for Siloam Springs, AR. They had in their possession a double-barreled sawed-off shotgun. That was in clear and direct violation of federal law. They were stopped, charged, and prosecuted for violating the National Firearms Act.

Their sole defense at trial was that the Second Amendment gave them the right to possess and transport such a weapon unfettered by national law. In short, the National Firearms Act was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court issued its opinion in 1939. It became the defining opinion concerning what the Second Amendment meant. The opinion, which has never been overridden, was not that long.

## NOT AN INDIVIDUAL RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS

The court ruled that the right mentioned in the Second Amendment was not an individual right to own guns. Rather, the amendment was intended to guarantee to each state the right to have a state militia, which Congress would not be authorized to disarm.

For some time now we have called the state militia the National Guard.

Were Miller or Layton members of the National Guard? Had either of them been issued their shotgun by the state militia? The answer to both questions was no.

Since the right to keep and bear arms, as mentioned in the Second Amend-

ment, was inextricably tied to a state's need for a well-regulated militia, and since these two gentlemen had no connection to the state militia, it was easy for the court to rule that they could be prosecuted for violating the National Firearms Act.

## LAW APPEARED ETCHED IN STONE

How settled was the law in this area after this case?

Take the case of Morton Grove, IL. Morton Grove is a suburb of Chicago. In the 1980s, a majority of people in this community decided they wanted to prevent a gun shop from opening near a public school. Then, they decided they wanted to ban all guns [with, of course, the obvious exceptions to law enforcement, collectors, and other "reasonable" exceptions]. They did.

Lawsuits ensued. Those challenging the law argued that the Second Amendment, as a part of America's highest law, prevented this.

The lower court, relying on the meaning given the Second Amendment in the 1939 Miller case, ruled against those challenging the law. The court's opinion was so direct and resolute that when the court ruled, as in Miller, that the amendment applied to state militias, those losing the case didn't even bother appealing the decision.

## FAILURE TO APPEAL REVEALING

Considering the intensity of gun enthusiasts on the issue of the right to have guns, the failure to even try appealing the court's decision is especially revealing. It revealed how settled the law was.

Until recently, that is.

Those forces who think Miller was wrongly decided [the NRA comes to mind] have been circulating the myth that the Supreme Court has never actually decided what the Second Amendment means.

Arguably the best historian in the nation, Garry Wills [who was, early in his academic career, affiliated with political conservatism] has some pretty harsh words for anyone who seeks to argue that the Second Amendment was intended to grant individuals the right to own a gun.

## 'LUDICROUS' AND 'INADEQUATE' ARGUMENTS

He calls historical arguments seeking to make this case "inadequate," and calls reasoning which tries to use the language of the amendment to make the same argument "ludicrous."

See MYTH Page 14

# Marijuana Addiction Just So Much Hokum

By Paul Armentano

The U.S. government believes that America is going to pot – literally.

The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has announced plans to spend \$4 million to establish the nation's first-ever "Center on Cannabis Addiction," which will be based in La Jolla, CA.

The goal of the center, according to NIDA's press release, is to "develop novel approaches to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of marijuana addiction."

Not familiar with the notion of marijuana addiction? You're not alone. In fact, aside from the handful of researchers who have discovered that there are gobs of federal grant money to be had hunting for the government's latest pot boogeyman, there's little consensus that such a syndrome is clinically relevant – if it even exists at all.

## DON'T DEPEND ON MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Don't try telling that to the mainstream press – which recently published headlines worldwide alleging, "Marijuana withdrawal rivals that of nicotine."

The alleged "study" behind the headlines involved all of 12 participants, each of whom were longtime users of pot and tobacco, and assessed the self-reported moods of folks after they were randomly chosen to abstain from both substances.

Big surprise: They weren't happy.

And don't try telling Big Pharma – which hopes to cash in on the much-hyped "pot and addiction" craze by touting psychoactive prescription drugs like Lithium to help hardcore smokers kick the marijuana habit.

Certainly don't try telling the drug "treatment" industry, whose spokespeople are quick to warn that marijuana "treatment" admissions have risen dramatically in recent years.

## DRUG COURTS MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

They neglect to explain that this increase is due entirely to the advent of drug courts sentencing minor pot offenders to rehab in lieu of jail.

According to state and national statistics, up to 70% of all individuals in drug treatment for marijuana are placed there by the criminal justice system.

Of those in treatment, some 36% had not even used marijuana in the 30 days prior to their admission. These are the "addicts?"

Indeed, the concept of pot addiction is big business – even if the evidence in support of the pseudosyndrome is flimsy at best.

And what does the science say? Well, according to the nonpartisan National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine – which published a multiyear million-dollar federal study assessing marijuana and health in 1999 – "millions of Americans have tried marijuana, but most are not regular users and few marijuana users become dependent on it."

## DEPENDENCE APPEARS LESS

The investigator added, "Although some marijuana users develop dependence, they appear to be less likely to do so than users of other drugs [including alcohol and nicotine], and marijuana dependence appears to be less severe than dependence on other drugs."

Just how less likely? According to the Institute of Medicine's 267-page report, fewer than 10% of those who try cannabis ever meet the clinical criteria for a diagnosis of "drug dependence" [based on DSM-III-R criteria].

By contrast, the report said that 32% of tobacco users, 23% of heroin users, 17% of cocaine users and 15% of alcohol users meet the criteria for "drug dependence."

In short, it's the legal drugs that have Americans hooked – not pot.

What about the claims that ceasing marijuana smoking can trigger withdrawal symptoms similar to those associated with quitting tobacco?



Once again, it's a matter of degree. According to the Institute of Medicine, pot's withdrawal symptoms, when identified, are "mild and subtle" compared with the profound physical syndromes associated with ceasing chronic alcohol use – which can be fatal – or those abstinence symptoms associated with daily tobacco use, which are typically severe enough to persuade individuals to reinstate their drug-taking behavior.

## WITHDRAWAL IS VERY MILD

As a result, cannabis' withdrawal symptoms are typically limited to feelings of mild anxiety, irritability, agitation and insomnia.

Most importantly, unlike the withdrawal symptoms associated with the cessation of most other intoxicants, pot's mild after-effects do not appear to be either severe or long-lasting enough to perpetuate marijuana use in individuals who have decided to quit.

This is why most marijuana smokers report voluntarily ceasing their cannabis use by age 30 with little physical or psychological difficulty.

By comparison, many cigarette smokers who pick up the habit early in life continue to smoke for the rest of their lives, despite making numerous efforts to quit.

Marijuana is widely accepted by the National Academy of Sciences, the Canadian Senate Special Committee on Illegal Drugs, the British Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and others to lack the severe physical and psychological dependence liability associated with most other intoxicants, including alcohol and tobacco.

Further, pot lacks the profound abstinence symptoms associated with most legal intoxicants, including caffeine.

That's not to say that some marijuana smokers don't find quitting difficult. Naturally, a handful of folks do, though this subpopulation is hardly large enough to warrant pot's legal classification [along with heroin] as an illicit substance with a "high potential for abuse."

Nor does this fact justify the continued arrest of more than 800,000 Americans annually for pot violations any more than such concerns would warrant the criminalization of booze or nicotine.

Now if I can only get NIDA to fork me over that \$4 million check.

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# APOLOGIZE

From Page 12

In his opinion, the risks posed by routine angiograms were much less than that of a missed heart attack.

What now? I knew I had to explain myself, but how much should I say? Like all doctors, I had made errors before, but never one this big – and in my own specialty, too. Should I just tell my patient the facts? Should I apologize?

Most doctors are afraid to take responsibility for medical errors. We are acutely aware of the potential hazards – legal and professional – of taking ownership of a mistake.

## APOLOGIES DON'T RAISE LEGAL RISKS

Studies have shown that physicians' apologies do not necessarily increase malpractice lawsuits. In fact, they may protect against litigation. Seventeen states have enacted legislation encouraging such apologies, some even making physicians' expressions of remorse inadmissible in court.

It was not always this way. Hospital legal departments routinely used to advise doctors never to admit responsibility for an error.

During my internship orientation nearly a decade ago, a lawyer for the hospital said that at some point in our careers every one of us would likely be sued.

The lawyer offered some advice: document your decision-making; document when a patient refuses treatment; never admit wrongdoing; never talk to an opposing attorney; and, finally, be nice to your patients.

## BEING NICE TO PATIENT PAYS OFF

Doctors who are nice to their patients are rarely sued, even in cases of egre-

gious malpractice.

I couldn't bring myself to talk to my patient in the cath lab, while everyone was watching, so I decided to wait until he got to the recovery room, where it was more private.

I found him there lying on a stretcher. The pain in his chest was gone, he happily informed me. However, the groin, where the catheter had been inserted, now hurt.

"They substituted one pain for another," he said, laughing.

I grasped the rails of the gurney. "I thought you had pericarditis," I said carefully. "I was obviously wrong. I'm sorry."

He seemed embarrassed. "No, no, please, the past is finished," he replied. "I am more interested in the future."

He asked about his prognosis. I told him that I thought it was good, though he would have to be on medications for the rest of his life. He nodded, looking disappointed.

A few days later, just before he was to be discharged, I stopped by his room. I asked him with whom he was going to follow up.

He told me that he had been given the name of another cardiologist but that he had decided to go with me.

"You have been terrific," he said. "Thank you."

I nodded silently, feeling empty. "You are much too generous," I said.

– Sandeep Jauhar is the author of *Intern: A Doctor's Initiation*

# Up To 800% Interest 'Pay Day' Loans Exacerbate Crisis

By Nick Carey

As hundreds of thousands of American homeowners fall behind on their mortgage payments, more people are turning to short-term loans with sky-high interest rates of up to 800% just to get by.

"We're hearing from around the country that many folks are buried deep in pay day loan debts as well as struggling with their mortgage payments," said Uriah King, a policy associate at the Center for Responsible Lending [CRL].

Oklahoma is one of the leading states in pay day loans, especially along Midwest City's Air Depot Boulevard in front of Tinker Air Force Base.

A pay day loan is typically for a few hundred dollars, with a term of two weeks, and an interest rate as high as 800%. The average borrower ends up paying back \$793 for a \$325 loan, according to the Center.

The Center also estimates pay day lenders issued more than \$28 billion in loans in 2005, the latest available figures.

## LENDERS AGGRESSIVE IN COLLECTING

On top of the exorbitant cost, pay day loans have an even darker side. Pay day lenders are very aggressive when it comes to getting paid.

Ohio is on the front line of the U.S. housing crisis. According to the Mortgage Bankers Association, at the end of the fourth quarter Ohio had 3.88% of home loans in the process of foreclosure, the highest of all the 50 U.S. states.

The "Rust Belt" state's woes have been further compounded by the loss of 235,900 manufacturing jobs between 2000 and 2007.

But while the state as a whole has not done well in recent years, pay day lenders have proliferated.

Bill Faith, executive director of COHHIO, an umbrella group representing some 600 non-profit agencies in Ohio, said the state is home to some 1,650 pay day loan lenders – more than all of Ohio's McDonald's, Burger Kings and Wendy's fast-food franchises put together.

## AVERAGE PAYOFF IS TWO YEARS

It takes the average borrower two years to get out of a pay day loan, he said.

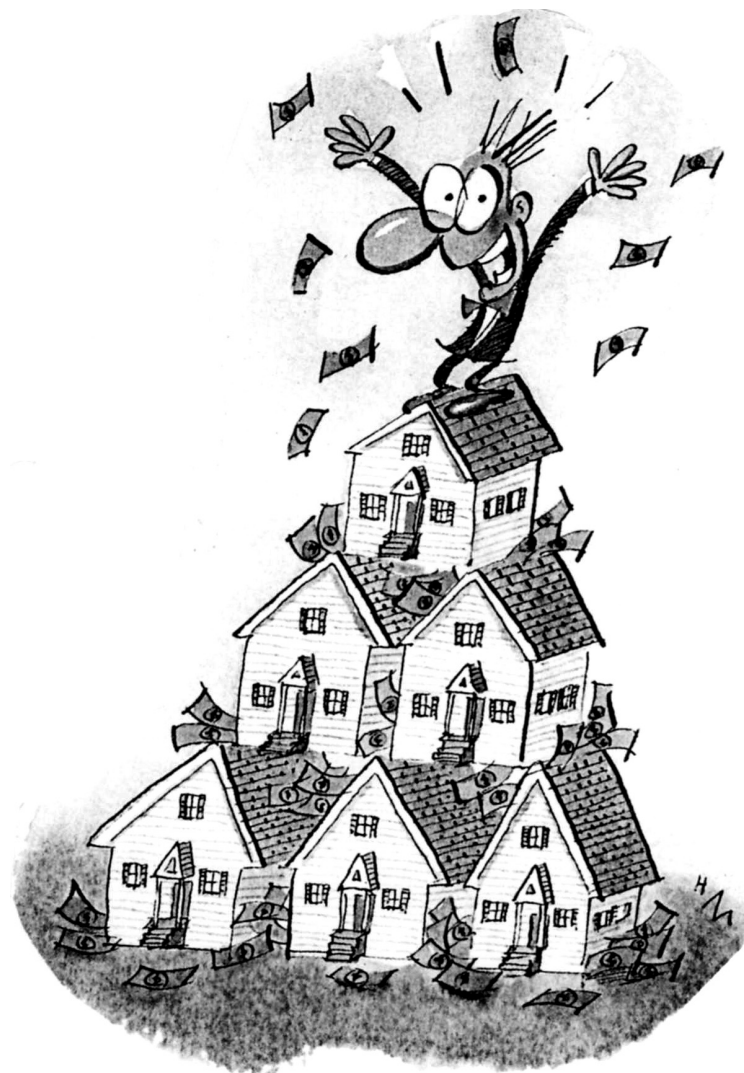
Robert Frank, an economics professor at Cornell University, equates pay day loans with "handing a suicidal person a noose" because many people can't control their finances and end up mired in debt.

"These loans lead to more bankruptcies and wipe out people's savings, which is bad for the economy," he said. "This is a problem that has been caused by deregulation" of the U.S. financial sector in the 1990s.

But even in states like New York where pay day loan caps or bans exist, loopholes allow out-of-state lenders to provide loans over the Internet.

## SINGLE MOM LOSES HER HOUSE

Janet Hudson, 40, ran into pay day loans when she and her fiance broke up, leaving her with a young son and a \$1,000 monthly mortgage payment.



Short on cash, she took out three small pay day loans online totaling \$900 but fell behind with her payments. Soon her monthly interest and fees totaled \$800. She lost her house.

A national 36% cap on pay day loans to members of the military went into effect last October.

The cap was proposed by Republican Sen. Jim Talent and Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson – citing APR of up to 800% as harmful to the battle readiness and morale of the U.S. Armed Forces.

There are now proposals in other states – including Ohio, Virginia, Arizona and Colorado – to bring in a 36% cap.

In Arkansas, Attorney General Dustin McDaniel sent a letter to pay day lenders on March 18 asking them to shut down or face a lawsuit, saying they have made a "lot of money on the backs of Arkansas consumers, mostly the working poor."

Thanks to the credit crunch and foreclosure crisis, state and federal policymakers are taking a hard look at the policy of credit at any cost," the CRL's King said. "But more needs to be done, fast."

© Reuters

## Pharmacist Rapped For Refusing Client

Bravo to the Wisconsin appeals court that upheld sanctions against a Catholic pharmacist who refused to dispense birth control pills to a woman and wouldn't transfer her prescription elsewhere.

The 3rd District Court of Appeals ruled that the punishment the Wisconsin state Pharmacy Examining Board handed down against pharmacist Neil Noesen did not violate his state constitutional rights, specifically his "right of conscience" to religiously oppose birth control.

"Noesen abandoned even the steps necessary to perform in a minimally competent manner under any standard of care," the three-judge panel said.

The decision upheld a ruling by Barron County Circuit Judge James Babler.

## MYTH

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Wills does a great job of demonstrating what phrases like "bear arms" really mean, and his conclusion supports the Supreme Court's 1939 opinion.

What he doesn't mention is that anyone who took the time to read the Annals of Congress [what we today call the Congressional Record] would find the following: There is not one reference during the debate in Congress over the proposing of the Second Amendment about an individual's right to protect themselves or their property or the use of guns for sportsmanship.

Not a single reference.

## RIPPLE EFFECTS OF LATEST CASE

The recent case over the Second Amendment is over a law covering 10 square miles [Washington, DC]. In spite of that, the ripple effect from this case will be huge.

An interesting side issue with the case is that the White House is upset with the Solicitor General who took the position during oral argument that the present court should not [that is not a typo] declare the DC law unconstitutional.

But, get ready. Even if the Roberts' court doesn't declare the DC law unconstitutional, it may still open the door wide enough to allow lower courts to reverse what has been the law of the land since 1939.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin praised the ruling as important for women's access to reproductive health care.

## SHE MISSED THE FIRST DOSE

According to court records, Noesen was working as a substitute pharmacist at a Menomonie, WI, K-Mart in 2002 when a University of Wisconsin-Stout student sought to refill her birth control prescription.

Noesen testified he advised the woman of his objection to the use of contraception and refused to fill the prescription or tell her how or where she could get it refilled.

The woman was able to get the prescription filled two days later but missed the first dose of the medication, court records said. She filed a complaint with the state Department of Regulation and Licensing.

Noesen, 34, of St. Paul, MN, told regulators that he is a "devout" Roman Catholic and refused to refill the prescription or release it to another pharmacy because he didn't want to commit a sin by "impairing the fertility of a human being."

## ENFORCING HIS VIEWS ON OTHERS

Guess he wouldn't sell condoms, either. Would he refuse to sell a morning-after medication to a rape victim?

Everyone is entitled to their opinion but nobody is entitled to visit their religious views on persons of a different persuasion in a public venue such as a drug store.

The Pharmacy Examining Board ruled in 2005 that Noesen failed to carry out his professional responsibility to get the woman's prescription to someone else if he wouldn't fill it himself.

The board reprimanded Noesen and ordered him to attend ethics classes. He was allowed to keep his license as long as he informs all future employers in writing that he won't dispense birth control pills and outlines steps he will take to make sure a patient has access to medication.

The board also found Noesen liable for the cost of the proceedings against him – about \$20,000.

Bertrand Russell said it best: "The commonest objection to birth control is that it is against nature. For some reason we are not allowed to say that celibacy is against nature."

# The Dumbing Down Of America's People

By Susan Jacoby

"The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself." Ralph Waldo Emerson offered that observation in 1837, but his words echo with painful prescience in today's very different United States.

Americans are in serious intellectual trouble – in danger of losing our hard-won cultural capital to a virulent mixture of anti-intellectualism, anti-rationalism, and low expectations.

This is the last subject that any candidate would dare raise on the long and winding road to the White House.

It is almost impossible to talk about the manner in which public ignorance contributes to grave national problems without being labeled an "elitist," one of the most powerful pejoratives that can be applied to anyone aspiring to high office.

## PUBLIC ASSURED THEY ARE PLAIN FOLKS

Instead, politicians repeatedly assure Americans that they are just "folks," a patronizing term that you will search for in vain in important presidential speeches before 1980.

Just imagine: "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain ... and that government of the folks, by the folks, for the folks, shall not perish from the earth."

Such exaltations of ordinariness are among the distinguishing traits of anti-intellectualism in any era.

The classic work on this subject by Columbia University historian Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, was published in early 1963, between the anti-communist crusades of the McCarthy era and the social convulsions of the late 1960s.

## THE DARK SIDE OF AMERICANS

Hofstadter saw American anti-intellectualism as a basically cyclical phenomenon that often manifested itself as the dark side of the country's democratic impulses in religion and education.

Today's brand of anti-intellectualism is less a cycle than a flood. If Hofstadter [who died of leukemia in 1970 at age 54] had lived long enough to write a modern-day sequel, he would have found that our era of 24/7 infotainment has outstripped his most apocalyptic predictions about the future of American culture.

Dumbness, to paraphrase the late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, has been steadily defined downward for several decades, by a combination of heretofore irresistible forces.

## THE TRIUMPH OF VIDEO OVER PRINT

These include the triumph of video culture over print culture [and by video, I mean every form of digital media, as well as older electronic ones]; a disjunction between Americans' rising level of formal education and their shaky grasp of basic geography, science, and history; and the fusion of anti-rationalism with anti-intellectualism.

First and foremost among the vectors of the new anti-intellectualism is video.

# The Importance Of Remaining Rebellious

By Jim Hightower

There's an unfortunate tendency in our country for autocratic officials to clamp down on our fundamental rights of free speech and assembly – especially when the Powers That Be don't like what we are gathering together to say. On the other hand, our country is blessed with rebels who have a fortunate tendency to push back against the autocrats.

At the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, protesters against the Iraq war planned a mass demonstration on what's known as the Great Lawn of Central Park. They intended to make public use of this public land, but were curtly denied a permit.

Why? Officials said that protesters would harm the grass of the Great Lawn and that an unwritten regulation only allowed crowds of 50,000 or less to be on the 13-acre lawn at one time.

Excuse us, said the protest leaders, but much larger crowds have routinely been allowed there for concerts and other events. Indeed, before our application, they said, there have been no limits on crowd size.

Go away, said the officials.

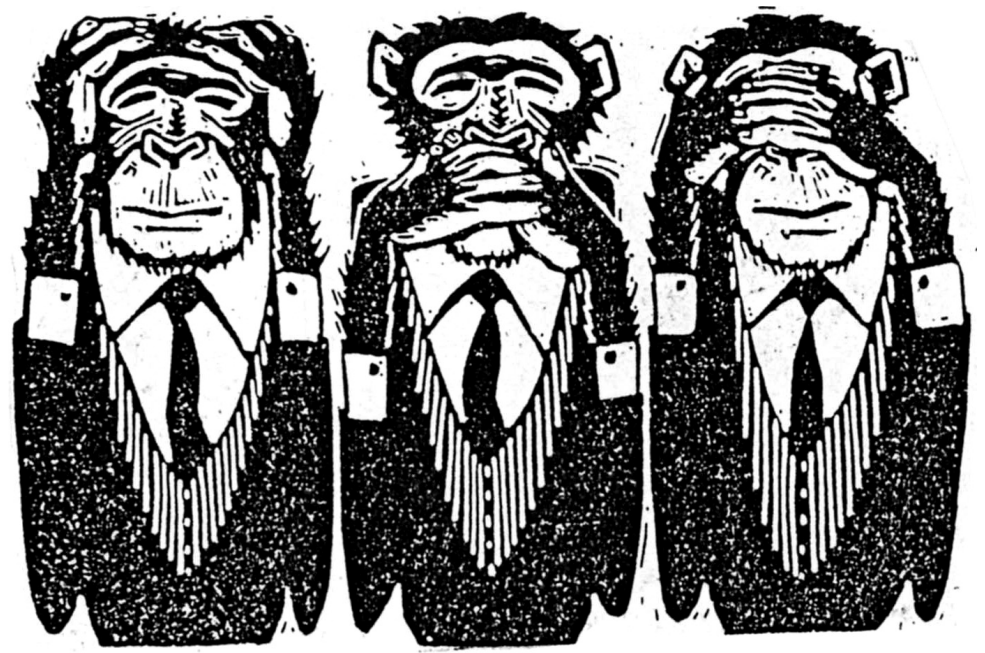
Well, while they were shut out of the people's park for the duration of the political convention, the groups did not go away. Instead, they filed suit in federal court, charging the city with unlawful denial of their First Amendment rights. Finally, after three years of litigation, city officials have backed away from their unconstitutional position and settled the case.

In this important victory for free speech, the city will pay \$500,000 in legal costs that the groups incurred and officials will no longer set an arbitrary limit on protest numbers or deny access to the Great Lawn on political grounds.

Our freedom and democratic rights were not "won" for us by the founders back in the 1700s. Rather, democracy is a historic fight that we must constantly re-win – a fight that depends on Americans remaining rebellious.

## BEWARE THE NOT-SO-FINE PRINT

It's time for another trip into the Far, Far, Far-Out Frontiers of the Free Enter-



The decline of book, newspaper, and magazine reading is by now an old story.

The dropoff is most pronounced among the young, but it continues to accelerate and afflict Americans of all ages and education levels.

Reading has declined not only among the poorly educated, according to a report last year by the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1982, 82% of college graduates read novels or poems for pleasure; two decades later, only 67% did.

## THE DECLINE OF READING DOCUMENTED

More than 40% of Americans under 44 did not read a single book – fiction or nonfiction – over the course of a year. The proportion of 17-year-olds who read nothing [unless required to do so for school] more than doubled between 1984 and 2004. This time period, of course, encompasses the rise of personal computers, Web surfing, and videogames.

In a study released last August, University of Washington researchers found that babies between eight and 16 months recognized an average of six to eight fewer words for every hour spent watching videos.

I cannot prove that reading for hours in a treehouse [which is what I was doing when I was 13] creates more informed citizens than hammering away at a Microsoft Xbox or obsessing about Facebook profiles.

## PUBLIC CAN'T REMEMBER RECENT NEWS EVENTS

But the inability to concentrate for long periods of time – as distinct from brief reading hits for information on the Web – seems to me intimately related to the inability of the public to remember even recent news events.

It is not surprising, for example, that less has been heard from the presidential candidates about the Iraq war in the later stages of the primary campaign than in the earlier ones, simply because there have been fewer video reports of violence in Iraq.

Candidates, like voters, emphasize the latest news, not necessarily the most important news.

As video consumers become progressively more impatient with the process of acquiring information through written language, all politicians find themselves under great pressure to deliver their messages as quickly as possible – and

See DUMBING DOWN Page 16

prise.

Today, Spaceship Hightower takes you on a perilous journey into the dark hole of commerce known as: "Fine Print." Our intergalactic guide is Consumer Reports magazine, which always reads the fine print and reports on it monthly.

Take a squint at this ad for an exercise device, for example. It depicts before-and-after photos of a guy who has gone from chubby to svelte. It's obvious, however, that they simply superimposed the "before" guy's head on the "after" guy's body. Still, the ad copy tells potential buyers that the two photos are "genuine" and "unretouched."

How can that be? A little footnote explains it: "Reader understands that by 'unretouched,' we may mean slightly altered."

Let's move on to a bright star of consumer brand names, Crest toothpaste. The label proudly proclaims, "This Crest is specially formulated to help prevent staining."

Excellent, you might say – until you read the tiny type, which informs you that the active ingredient in the tube of tooth goo "may produce surface staining of teeth."

Still, the company asserts that this product has a "unique whitening ingredient" to remove stains – apparently including removal of stains the toothpaste causes!

Here's another fine-print twist to cause consumer alarm. Nips candy changed its packaging last year to include a bold box on the front proclaiming "Value Pack!"

Always beware of corporate claims of giving you a good deal. Sure enough, the new package of Nips contains only four ounces of candy – 27% less than the old package. The price, however, did not drop even by a penny.

Then there's the coupon offering "10% off" on a service call. Except the fine print reads, "Not valid on service calls." Be careful out there.

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# Is Evolution Really A Matter Of Faith?

By Leonard Steinhorn and Charles Steinhorn

There are moments in history when wrongheadedness leads to interesting insights. Perhaps this is one of them.

Consider the Republican presidential candidates who said they didn't "believe in evolution" at a debate earlier this year. They may have been onto something – but for all the wrong reasons.

The truth is, we don't believe in evolution, either. But we don't have to, because we know it to be factually true.

That's the nugget of insight that's too often been missing from the public debate ever since Darwin first laid out his theory of evolution almost a century-and-a-half ago.

As a natural phenomenon based on scientific evidence, evolution is not a matter of belief or faith, any more than gravity or genetics, and to ask whether someone believes in it is a nonsensical question, much like asking if someone believes in subatomic particles.

## POPULAR PRESS GETS IT WRONG

Yet read the popular press and you'd think that the truth of evolution is based not on science or knowledge but on one's personal worldview irrespective of evidence or proof, as if one's approach to evolution should be no different from the act of believing in, say, immaculate conception or the existence of God.

Recently we conducted a newspaper database search of the phrase "believe in evolution" and found nearly a thousand citations from the last five years.

Typical is a New York Times article that describes a married couple as "Christians who believe in evolution," which suggests that scientific evidence and facts, like religion, can be true or false based on whether we believe in them or not.

The generous interpretation is that the press is simply lazy, preferring shorthand to a more accurate description, which might say that so-and-so "accepts [or doesn't accept] the fact that evolution has occurred."

## DENYING ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

Stating it that way would acknowledge the fact of evolution and show that those who refuse to accept it are denying established evidence and proof.

Press reporting may also reflect a larger ignorance of science and specifically the meaning of "theory" as applied to natural phenomena. In science, "theory" has nothing to do with its popular usage as a notion or opinion, as when someone might offer a "theory as to why Bush went to war."

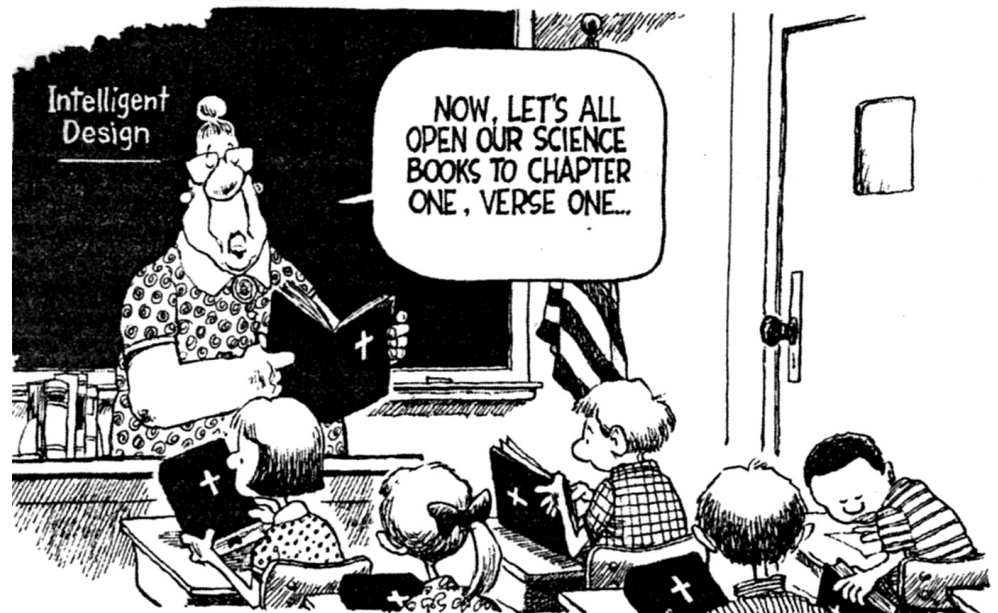
Rather, a scientific theory offers a coherent and conceptual explanation for facts and evidence that have been observed and accumulated; it must be predictive and capable of testing by further scientific observation.

## LOGICAL AND RATIONAL SENSE

Thus the theory of evolution aims to make logical and rational sense of the facts of evolution, proposing mechanisms to explain how evolution occurs. Those who attack evolution as merely a "theory" misunderstand what a scientific theory is.

Compounding the problem is the he-said, she-said style of journalism so prevalent today, which leaves media vulnerable to a trap set by proponents of the latest attack on evolution, "intelligent design," which is little more than an artifice devised to inject religion into the biology classroom.

Rather than portray "intelligent design" for what it is, a clever recycling of a



centuries-old philosophical argument to "prove" the existence of God that has been dressed up as a scientific theory, the press reports it as an alternative to evolution and quotes advocates who complain about "viewpoint discrimination" against their cause.

## REAGAN'S SPEECH WRITER WEIGHS IN

This manufactured controversy will gain more media attention in 2008 with the release of *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, a movie promoting "intelligent design" that stars actor Ben Stein, who claims it will chronicle how "freedom of inquiry in science is being suppressed."

Stein, former Reagan speechwriter, demonizes "Big Science" as an entrenched establishment that squashes dissent, claiming scientific credibility for "intelligent design" when in fact there is none.

Thus evolution simply becomes merely another "viewpoint" in the public debate, lending plausibility to the idea that it is a notion to be believed rather than a scientific fact to be known.

That illustrates a larger problem that far transcends the evolution discussion. For years, many religious conservatives have tried to blur the line between their beliefs and objective truths.

## FACTS BECOME JUST ANOTHER OPINION

If belief masquerades as fact, and if the press allows them to coexist on an equal footing, then fact becomes just another opinion and belief gains credibility as an alternative.

The media simply play along, reporting the controversy, as if no side has a greater claim to truth.

Nor is science the only field jeopardized by this blurring of belief and truth. It touches history and every other discipline dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge.

So when Republican presidential candidates say they don't believe in evolution, bravo for them. If only they – and the media covering them – understood the real meaning of what they say.

– Leonard Steinhorn is a professor of communication at American University and author of *The Greater Generation: In Defense of the Baby Boom Legacy*. Charles Steinhorn is a professor of mathematics at Vassar College.

# DUMBING DOWN

From Page 15

quickness today is much quicker than it used to be.

## POLITICAL SOUNDBITES DIMINISHING

Harvard University's Kiku Adatto found that between 1968 and 1988, the average sound bite on the news for a presidential candidate – featuring the candidate's own voice – dropped from 42.3 seconds to 9.8 seconds.

By 2000, according to another Harvard study, the daily candidate bite was down to just 7.8 seconds.

The shrinking public attention span fostered by video is closely tied to the second important anti-intellectual force in American culture: The erosion of general knowledge.

People accustomed to hearing their president explain complicated policy choices by snapping "I'm the decider" may find it almost impossible to imagine the pains that Franklin D. Roosevelt took, in the grim months after Pearl Harbor, to explain why U.S. armed forces were suffering one defeat after another in the Pacific.

This is a portrait not only of a different presidency and president but also of a different country and citizenry, one that lacked access to satellite-enhanced Google maps but was far more receptive to learning and complexity than today's public.

## INDIFFERENT TO LOCATION OF OTHER NATIONS

According to a 2006 survey by National Geographic-Roper, nearly half of Americans between ages 18 and 24 do not think it necessary to know the location of other countries in which important news is being made.

More than a third consider it "not at all important" to know a foreign language, and only 14% consider it "very important."

That leads us to the third and final factor behind the new American dumbness: Not lack of knowledge per se but arrogance about that lack of knowledge. The

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problem is not just the things we do not know.

Consider the one in five American adults who, according to the National Science Foundation, thinks the sun revolves around the Earth.

There is no quick cure for this epidemic of arrogant anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism; rote efforts to raise standardized test scores by stuffing students with specific answers to specific questions on specific tests will not do the job.

Moreover, the people who exemplify the problem are usually oblivious to it. ["Hardly anyone believes himself to be against thought and culture," Hofstadter noted.]

It is past time for a serious national discussion about whether, as a nation, we truly value intellect and rationality.

If this indeed turns out to be a "change election," the low level of discourse in a country with a mind taught to aim at low objects ought to be the first item on the change agenda.

– Susan Jacoby's new book is *The Age of American Unreason*. This essay was first published by *The Washington Post*. Used with permission of the *Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service*.

## Out Of The Mouth Of Babes

A little girl was sitting on her grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story. From time to time, she would take her eyes off the book and reach up to touch his wrinkled cheek. She was alternately stroking her own cheek, then his again.

Finally she spoke up. "Grandpa, did God make you?" "Yes, sweetheart," he answered. "God made me a long time ago." "Oh," she paused. "Grandpa, did God make me, too?" "Yes, indeed, honey," he said. "God made you just a little while ago." Feeling their respective faces again, she observed, "God's getting better at it, isn't he?"

## Misleading Media

# Things We Think We Know That Aren't So

By Mark Weisbrot

"A free press is supposed to function as our democracy's immune system against gross errors of fact and understanding," wrote Al Gore in his book, *The Assault on Reason*.

It doesn't and that is what makes the mass media one of the most important obstacles to social and economic progress in the 21st Century.

How the media treat repeated falsehoods is a key issue. For example, when the New York Times reports on the allegation – spread by his enemies – that presidential candidate Barack Obama is a Muslim, there is a sentence that follows immediately: "In fact, he is a Christian."

The media didn't do this kind of "immune system" work when it reported on the run-up to the Iraq war. As a result, more than 70% of Americans were convinced that Saddam Hussein was involved in the massacre of Sept. 11.

### THE TOLL ON LIVES CONTINUES

More than 4,000 Americans and over one million Iraqis have been killed in the violence that perhaps could have been averted with better journalism.

A new study by the Center for Public Integrity, "The War Card: Orchestrated Deception on the Path to War," documents 935 false statements by President Bush and seven top officials of his administration.

The report notes that "much of the wall-to-wall media coverage provided additional, 'independent' validation of the Bush administration's false statements about Iraq."

Filmmaker Michael Moore told CNN's Wolf Blitzer, "We're in the 5th year of this war because you, and CNN ... didn't do your jobs back then and now here we are in this mess."

### SOCIAL SECURITY IS A GOOD EXAMPLE

The mass media fail us on many issues other than war and peace. Most Americans under 50 think they are never going to see their Social Security benefits.

In fact, the probability that they won't get their Social Security benefits is about the same as the chance that there won't be a U.S. government when they retire – pretty close to zero.

The media could correct this widespread false belief by merely inserting a few undisputed facts about Social Security when reporting false statements from politicians and interest groups.

### SOUNDEST IN ITS HISTORY

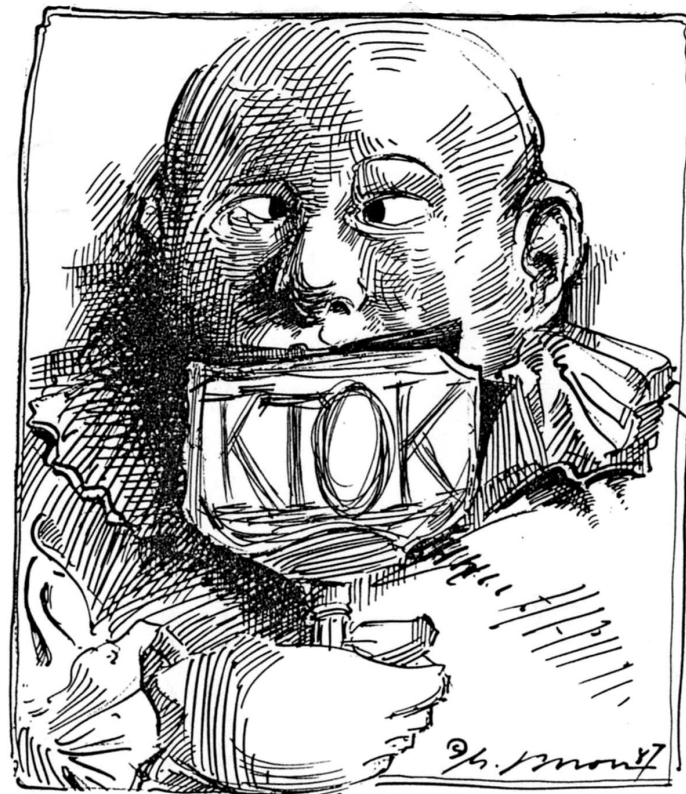
For example: "Social Security is more financially sound than it has been throughout most of its 71-year history;" or "Social Security's projected shortfall over the next 75 years is less [as a percent of national income] than what was fixed in each of the following decades: 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s."

Millions of Americans are now "under water" on their homes – that is, they owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth. The rate of mortgage delinquencies and foreclosures is breaking records, and has much further to go.

Many of these personal financial tragedies could have been avoided had media reported on the obvious risks of buying a house while a record bubble in house prices was ballooning.

### WAS THE SOURCE TRUSTWORTHY?

Instead, the number one media source on the housing market was David Leareh, then chief economist for the National Association of Realtors, and author of the 2005 book *Are You Missing The Real Estate Boom? Why Home Values*



*And Other Real Estate Investments Will Climb Through The End Of The Decade – And How You Can Profit From It.*

Reporting on the stock market bubble of the late '90s was even worse.

The media are not monolithic, and the TV media – main object of Gore's criticism – tend to be worse than the print media.

Some reporters break with current trends. In 2006 the New York Times used the Center for Economic and Policy Research [where I am co-director] as its most cited source on the housing market, and therefore was able to see the housing bubble before it broke.

### IT'S THE HERD MENTALITY

But it is surprising how uniform the major media are on many issues, given that there are competing news organizations. A herd mentality often prevails: journalists know that they will almost never get in trouble for reporting something that is wrong when everyone else is also saying it; but they do take a risk when they report something different, even if it is true.

In Washington, when one raises the issue of media responsibility, a common response – from policy analysts, political operatives, and journalists – is that the problem is with the American people, that they are just stupid.

### HEARD THINGS REPEATED BY MEDIA

Interestingly, however, when one strays a bit from their own area of expertise or concentration, it appears that these professionals also believe a number of falsehoods on important issues – apparently from having heard these things repeated in media.

Of course the best counterweight to the media's transgressions is an informed and active citizenry.

Part of the reason that the media treat Barack Obama more fairly than they treat Social Security is that Obama has millions of active supporters who would raise hell if the media were to engage in serious abuses of him or his candidacy.

Over the long run, we will need to subject the privately owned mass media to more competition. This will come increasingly from the Internet, but real competition will also require an expanded and better quality public media sector.

Until this competition gets a lot bigger, it will be up to the citizenry to hold our highly concentrated media accountable as best we can.

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# NCLB Is Sidelining Other Key Subjects

By Kathleen Manzo

Most of the nation's elementary schools added at least 75 minutes of instruction time in reading and mathematics each week – often twice that amount – in the five years after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Sadly, many did 80 minutes by skimming that time from the teaching of science, social studies, the arts, recess, and physical education.

An analysis by the Center on Education Policy, a Washington-based research group, expands on the findings of the organization's nationally representative survey released last summer.

That study found that more than six in 10 school districts had increased reading and math instruction between the 2001-02 and 2006-07 school years, and that more than four in 10 did so while significantly reducing time spent on other subjects.

The findings offer further evidence that the NCLB law has led to sizable shifts in the curriculum.

"This report shows the magnitude of the changes in that we see that substantial amounts of time have been added to reading and math instruction, and substantial amounts of time have been taken from other subjects," said Jack Jennings, the center's president and chief executive officer.

"The survey's conclusion is solid ... although it's not clear if it's a good thing or a bad thing to have all that additional time spent on reading and math."

The findings confirm what some subject-area experts have been arguing over the past several years.

Groups representing educators in history and social studies, the arts, and foreign languages have been pressing for changes to the law – which is up for reau-

thorization – contending that the subjects have been marginalized because they are not part of its accountability measures.

A draft NCLB reauthorization proposal by a House panel this past fall featured potential incentives for states to test students in core subjects other than those now required under the law – reading, math, and science.

The U.S. Department of Education contends that NCLB requires the teaching of all core subjects, even if they are not included in its accountability measures.

"We have been hearing from our elementary school teachers for a number of years that they have less and less time to teach social studies," said Gayle Thieman, president of the National Council for the Social Studies.

"What social studies does particularly well is give students the opportunity to apply their literacy skills, build vocabulary, learn concepts, and get the background knowledge they need."

Thieman noted that NCSS members have also complained that they have fewer professional development opportunities in the social studies because those resources are more often being spent on teacher training in math and reading.

Jennings said federal officials and researchers should be studying ways for teachers to integrate content from other subject areas into math and reading lessons, and vice versa.

"That's how schools are dealing with the realities of having to raise test scores and wanting kids to be exposed to other subject areas," he said. "We should be studying this blending of curriculum and trying to encourage good practices, because we are not going to back down from accountability."

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# About Those New Seven Deadly Sins

By Liliana Segura

It would appear the Vatican has unveiled a list of seven new sins. Not just any sins. Mortal sins. The kind that, if gone unconfessed, will send you to hell.

Putting aside the “why” for a moment, the list is interesting. Not what you’d expect. Some might go so far as to call it progressive.

Sure, it includes abortion [no news there] as well as stem-cell research [that scientific scourge]. It also includes such communal and contemporary transgressions as creating pollution and contributing to the ever-widening divide between rich and poor.

The logic, apparently, is to apply some basic moral principles to our new age of technological advancement and globalization.

“But I don’t need religion to distinguish right and wrong!” you might say – and I might be among you. Fair enough, but for the over a billion baptized Catholics in the world – at least some of whom must still practice – the influence of the Church is hardly insignificant.

## IT JUST GOT RID OF LIMBO

Even in its uniquely punitive way, for an institution that only recently came around to rejecting Limbo, some of these new rules must surely be a sign of progress.

Even lapsed Catholics can probably agree that there’s something refreshing about the notion of taking collective responsibility for things like protecting the environment or addressing the growing societal divide.

Condemning those who “contribute to social injustice” sounds downright liberation theological. [Not very Roman.]

“If yesterday sin had a rather individualistic dimension, today it has a weight, a resonance, that’s especially social, rather than individual,” said the Archbishop Gianfranco Girotti, the head of the Apostolic Penitentiary, which “deals with matters of conscience and grants absolution.”

Cool. Even a slow moving dinosaur like the Vatican can get behind a little modern social justice.

## IT IS NOW HARDER TO BECOME A SAINT

Given some of the Church’s other priorities in the past few years – including tightening its rules for achieving sainthood, and last year, releasing the rather goofy “Ten Commandments” for drivers – road rage, drunk driving, vehicular rudeness – this could be considered welcome news to those who call themselves Catholic.

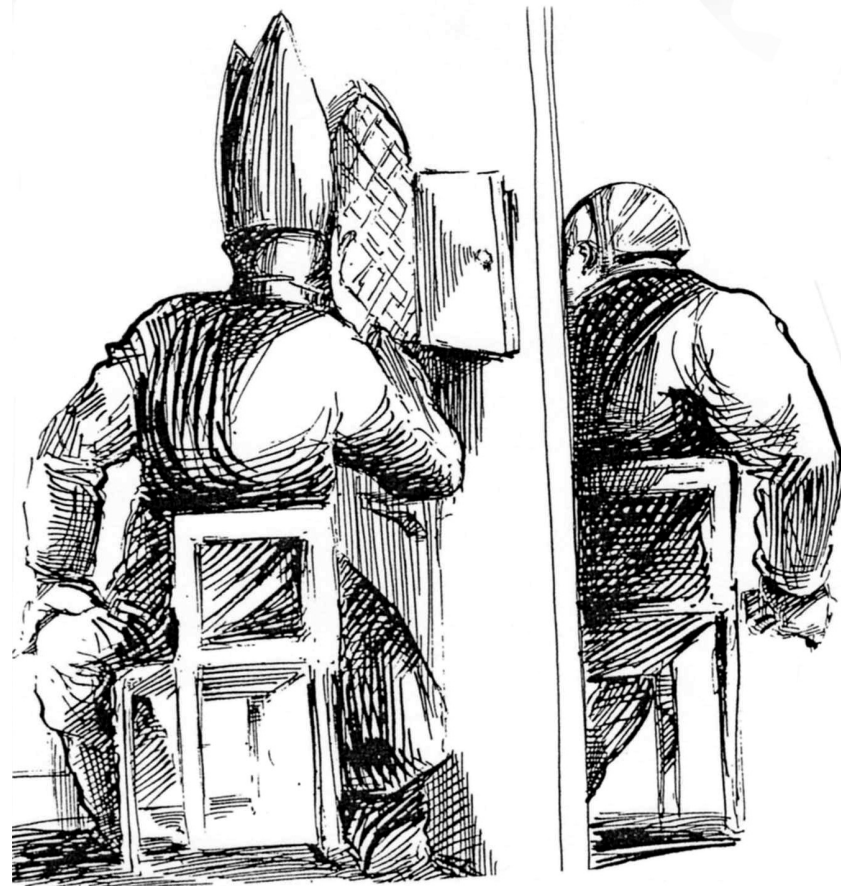
It’s easy to kick the Church for its antiquatedness, its sexual oppression, its inability to keep its priests away from the altar boys. For all its power, the Catholic Church offers a common cultural punch line.

The original Seven Deadly Sins themselves are fascinating oddities. They are utterly vague – How much avarice is too much? How many people know what avarice is? – yet the punishments assigned to each are luridly specific.

## MORE OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Given to excessive pride? Thou shall be broken on the wheel. Greed? Force-fed rats, toads, and snakes. Envy? A vat of freezing water. And so on.

Curious about what brand of eternal hellfire might be newly imposed on some-



one for say, littering – not to mention what an official announcement of a new set of sins might look like – I visited the Vatican’s home on the web, but was disappointed to find no information on the new seven sins.

The so-called “new” sins appear to fall into a category that practicing Catholics would call “social” sins, and which have existed in some form or other, for years.

There’s also major irony here, an absurd contradiction at the root of the Church’s new emphasis on social sins.

## THE CHURCH’S STANCE ON BIRTH CONTROL

Of its more damaging enduring doctrines, the Catholic Church’s stance on birth control has left generations of women – especially in poor and ravaged countries – in desperate straits. Human rights organizations for years have implored the Church to sanction birth control.

Isn’t that a vast and egregious form of social injustice? Wouldn’t the Church be guilty of its own mortal sins?

The Pope is coming to America. [Call it his Seven Deadlier Sins Tour.] He may have come out against the war in Iraq – and where, pray tell, is “war” in the list of deadly sins?

If the Vatican can claim to speak for social justice – a hard sell for many – it’s going to have to come to terms with its cruel doctrines against women, and change them.

Catholicism might still be one of the world’s dominant religions, but especially in the U.S., it has been on the decline for a reason.

Catholicism has lost more members than any other religion in the country. If the Church is really looking for ways to bring people back to the fold, it might start, not by promoting social responsibility, but by taking some.

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# Outsourcing: What’ll They Think Of Next?

By Jim Hightower

Just when you think that surely the offshoring craze has peaked, here come more stories of “Globalization Gone Wild.”

McClatchy Co., the California-based newspaper chain, has announced that it is outsourcing some of its jobs to India. Copyediting and design work for certain sections of its Miami Herald newspaper are being shipped to a New Delhi corporation with the mind-boggling name of Mindworks Global Media. Ironically, part of the work to be handled 8,400 miles away from the Herald’s readers is editing and design for a weekly section on community news.

But outsourcing is not just an American game. Waterford, the renowned crystal maker that has been in Dublin, Ireland, since 1783, has built its reputation on the fine skills of its Irish glass masters. Now, however, it has cut its Dublin workforce in half and moved about a fifth of its production to Poland and the Czech Republic.

The pricey, quintessentially Irish glassware – from chandeliers to champagne flutes – is being made in Central Europe by workers paid a fourth of what the Dublin artisans were paid.

Waterford’s CEO says that prices for the faux Irish crystal will not be lowered and insists that consumers won’t care where the crystal is made.

Maybe, but do couples care where their baby is made? Apparently not. There’s a growing global industry of outsourced pregnancies, with clinics in India making available young, very-low-income local women to be surrogate mothers for well-off, infertile couples from America, Taiwan, Britain and elsewhere. The couples provide the sperm and pay a fraction of the going rate for surrogate moms in the United States, and – voila! – the “wombs for rent” clinics deliver a baby.

It’s all part of the globalization follies, where the wealthy can find workers at cut-rate costs to do any sort of labor they need.

## STARBUCKS INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MYSTIQUE

About a year ago, a stinging message was delivered to the corporate honchos THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, APRIL 10, 2008, PAGE 18

of Starbucks, the mega-chain of costly coffees.

The writer decried the “commoditization of the Starbucks experience,” be-moaning the fact that the stores “no longer have the soul of the past and [instead] reflect a chain of stores vs. the warm feeling of a neighborhood store.”

He’s right, of course. You go into a Starbucks these days, and the talented barista who used to make your cup has been replaced by automatic, push-button coffee machines. Instead of a friendly “Thank you,” you hear, “Next.”

The interesting thing about the guy who wrote to the honchos is that he is none other than Howard Schultz, the founder and former CEO of Starbucks! Shortly after delivering his pointed critique, Schultz returned to the helm of the sprawling chain, promising to restore the “customer experience.”

It’s not going very well. He has gotten rid of the warmed-up egg sandwiches, whose gross smell overpowered even the heady aroma of coffee, which is what entices customers to come inside. But he has stuck with those push-button espresso machines and the inadequately trained staff.

In the year since Schultz’s return, Starbucks’ stock price fell 40%, and its stores are losing customers to genuine, locally owned coffeehouses.

As much as Schultz will tinker with image, the fact is that Starbucks is now just another huge chain, with 15,000 stores. They are so ubiquitous that have lost all mystique.

One near my home, for example, shares space with Jiffy Lube – now there’s an image for you!

What irony that Starbucks yearns for the image of the cool, independent coffee hangouts that Schultz spent the last 20 years trying to drive out of business.

Those places survived and now thrive, while his corporate chain has to compete with McDonald’s and Dunkin’ Donuts.

How cool is that?

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# U.S. Unions Need New Deal To Survive

By Andy Stern

It's no accident that the New Deal followed by four years the presidency of Calvin Coolidge, who once famously declared, "The chief business of the American people is business."

The human cost of the Great Depression created a change in climate that became the philosophical underpinning of the New Deal: The business of the American people was the people themselves – all of the people – not just the tycoons who made the "Roaring Twenties" roar and then crash.

Where the New Deal once served to rebalance the power between labor and capital, we are now perilously out of balance. In recent years, CEO salaries have gone up more than 600%.

Had we only tied CEO pay to the minimum wage in 1990, the minimum wage would be more than \$23 an hour and the average production worker would make more than \$110,000 a year.

Of course, we are as far today from the New Deal as the New Deal was from the Civil War. We cannot expect that work will be valued and rewarded in a global economy by reflexively copying strategies from an industrial economy.

Although our values stay the same, our strategies must change. In the 1930s, employers were local, so local unions were strategically aligned with their employers.

Today capital has gone global, trade is global, finance is global and, most important, companies are global – so how can unions assist members by just acting locally?

"Workers of the world unite" is no longer an ideological slogan; it is the basis of an effort SEIU embarked on four years ago to create global unions of workers who work for the same employers.

Moreover, almost all labor issues in the 1930s pitted American unions against

## ALIBI

From Page One

A Senate-approved measure would provide vouchers for poor kids on Tulsa's beleaguered north side. They can take the money to a private or parochial school.

Will they be taught that family planning is a sin if they wind up in a Catholic school? Or that Joseph Smith received a second Bible if they are Mormon?

As a wise man noted, parents aren't the only ones with rights. Children have a right to access a decent quality education, one that will allow them to function in a complex and technological society.

They also have the right to be outside the home and meet other children and develop social skills. Many homeschooled children are kept away from any but their kind.

Are homeschool parents violating the "No Child Left Behind" law requiring a teacher must be credentialed in the primary subjects that they teach?

As it stands, children in public schools have to take proficiency tests each year in order to show that they are learning.

For years, private schools claimed to have better results than public schools, but it is false, because, among other things, the test taking was self-selecting on the private side. A poor

private school could opt out.

One study showed that when leveled [such as two-parent families and middle-class income] public schools score as well or better than Catholic schools.

Even with that intrinsic advantage for the private schools, there were no academic differences between either type of schooling.

Home schooling isn't tested at all. What happens to homeschooled kids from poor environments who decide they want to go to college or get a good job and find out that Bible-thumping parents didn't prepare them.

Don't outlaw homeschooling, test all the students, making sure none are cheated of their birthright.

At minimum, the Oklahoma Legislature should legalize a local district checking on the kids to see if they were being educated or merely being held captive.

By at least age 12 a homeschooled child should have the right to opt out.

To facilitate that, the Legislature would have to require a minimum of outside inspection.

It's not a matter of eliminating homeschooling. It's a matter of guaranteeing every child a shot at a quality education.



American businesses. The relationship was almost always adversarial.

Today, America needs to act more as a team and create a new plan to compete in a global economy. That plan must start with universal health-care.

We simply cannot compete if we are the only nation on earth that asks our businesses to put the cost of healthcare on our products.

While modern developments – the Internet, fiber optics, cell phones and a globalized workforce and economy – have resulted in a profound transformation of the American economy, they have not erased the basic debate about the proper role of government.

Coolidge's heirs today are corporatists who have succeeded in rolling back many elements of the New Deal and the subsequent reforms that helped create a great American middle class.

Roosevelt understood that in addition to government programs, a balanced economy requires strong labor unions. Then, as now, increased unionization created higher wages and benefits for both union members and unorganized workers.

As unionization increased, the middle class grew. And as the percentage of workers represented by a union has declined in the past three decades, the disparity of wealth has increased.

Corporatists have persistently tried to weaken two of the New Deal pillars of economic fairness and redistribution: government and the law enacted in 1935 to give workers the freedom to form a union under the oversight of a National Labor Relations Board.

In recent years, the NLRB has increasingly been dominated by corporate interests issuing rulings hostile to workers' rights and creating new barriers to workers who want to form unions.

Today, more than half of all workers say they would join a union if they had the opportunity, yet less than 8% of private workers are in unions. [In Oklahoma it is less than 6%.]

Billion-dollar corporations hire professional "union avoidance consultants," who gang up on workers in unending private interviews, require them to watch hours of antiunion videos in "captive audience" meetings, punish or fire key supporters, threaten wage cutbacks and closings.

These corporations face no consequences for their actions or meaningless sanctions under the current weak law.

This is why Congress needs to enact the Employee Free Choice Act: To permit workers the choice to unite their voices at work.

The House of Representatives has already passed it, but Republicans blocked it in the Senate. Both Democratic presidential candidates support it, and its passage is critical to restoring fairness to the workplace.

As in 1935, America is faced with a choice. Is the role of government to serve the 99% of hard-working Americans or only corporations and the super-wealthy? The answer will lead to very different decisions on taxation, education, pensions and healthcare.

We need to take into account the vast changes that have occurred since the New Deal, and we must continually adjust as new changes take place.

America still needs strong unions – as well as a government on the side of working people – as part of the solution to rebalance power, provide greater fairness, make work pay and ensure that the dreams of all American children can still come true.

– The author is president of the Service Employees International Union [SEIU]

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