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Skills Centers Rescue Prisoners CareerTech Success

By Frosty Troy

Until 1970, inmates in state penal institutions were making license plates, growing crops or sitting on their duffs. That changed beginning in 1971 when a magnificent undertaking began.

The Skills Centers School System [SCSS] opened for operation at Hodgen in the Ouachita Forest in southeastern Oklahoma.

Three programs were offered during its first year of operation. The site, today known as the Jim E. Hamilton Skills Center, was the first of 19 Skills Centers' campuses.

The SCSS is a division of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education.

It isn't likely that the wealthy elite, such as G.T. Blankenship or Russell Perry who underwrite attacks on CareerTech, have ever visited a skills center.

The system currently operates training sites in 12 state-owned correctional facilities, four community correctional centers and three juvenile detention centers in Oklahoma.

SCSS is the embodiment of the old story of teaching an individual how to fish rather than giving out free fish.

The SCSS also administers diversion programs such as the state's Dropout Recovery Initiative and the Young Offender Initiative.

Offenders are given the opportunity to develop occupational competence, related academic knowledge, and life/employability skills.

The SCSS has strong relations with businesses and trade organizations so good jobs are a reality for inmates when they re-enter society.

That's why the State Chamber of Commerce and the state's business community strongly support the CareerTech system.

In FY 2007, the Skills Centers graduated 782 students in correctional facilities. To the credit of staff of the Skills Centers, 75.4% were placed in jobs related to their occupational training.

Why train them? Studies relating to ex-offender survival "on the streets" show occupational training and education are key to success when they are released from prison.



The Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs viciously attacks CareerTech as wasted money, showing the ignorance of the far right and the dim lights who support it.

Each day over 700 offender students attend programs in state-run adult or juvenile correctional facilities. The Oklahoma Department of Corrections estimates that over 8,000 Oklahoma offenders will be released from prison during FY '08.

Of the 75 current Skills Centers' employees, 65 actually work within the confines of a facility that houses offenders.

Funding sources for the Skills Centers includes state appropriations, federal funding from the Carl Perkins Act, and contracts with other state agencies.

President George Bush has again called for zero funding the Perkins Act but both parties on the Hill continue to ignore him, realizing the vital role the appropriation plays.

In 2005, the Skills Centers Division was awarded a \$1 million grant through the U.S. Department of Labor to serve Young Offenders.

This grant is designed to prepare young offenders to enter high demand, high-growth industries. The Department of Labor grant has been funded for three consecutive years,

but will end prior to the end of fiscal year 2008.

Over the past three years, 67% of all offenders who completed training were placed in jobs related to their training within 180 days of release.

The Skills program is needed now more than ever since an estimated 50,000 Hispanics have fled the state in the wake of House Bill 1804.

Industry-related programs represent the licensed trades, commercial and residential building construction, automotive service and repair, heavy highway construction, technology-based customer service, information technology and manufacturing.

The majority of the Skills Centers programs are located in minimum-security correctional facilities.

A select few programs are offered to medium security inmates who then work within the correctional facilities for approximately five years.

These offenders are critical to the maintenance and repair of facilities and production within Oklahoma Correctional Industries.

Ninety-seven inmates have attained journeyman status in the licensed trades in the past three years. These individuals amassed the required hours as apprentices under a Department of Corrections supervisor.

The state-recognized licensing as-

Other than alternative education, the last best hope of troubled youth is the Skills Centers School System.

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assessment vendor has brought the testing capability to the offenders while they are still incarcerated.

Once licensed, medium-security inmates perform critical tasks on behalf of the correctional facilities and have the ability to secure high-wage employment once released.

Currently, 37 medium-security offenders are enrolled in a U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Apprenticeship Training program and work in the furniture factory for Oklahoma Correctional Industries.

Worker shortages in areas such as welding, precision machining, product assembly, industrial maintenance and warehouse operations and distribution have caused the Skills Centers to change the focus of several existing training programs.

One result of these program modifications is an increased wage at entry for graduates. Another positive outcome is an increase in the percentage of graduates who are selected for these high-growth, high-demand positions. Both of these results affect graduate success and recidivism.

Many female offenders immediately take the role of mother and provider upon release. They are required to be prepared to manage a household, care for children, and find quality employment to meet new financial obligations.

Issues such as child care, housing, health issues, and management of financial resources become critical challenges to successful transition.

Recognizing that female offenders need additional support and guidance, SCSS employs a Female Transition Specialist to work specifically with females as they transition from corrections to the local community.

Traditional career/technical education programs that interest female offenders often fail to produce quality employment opportunities.

SCSS female offender programs have evolved to include transporta-

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Observations

Bravo Askins!

Thank goodness Jeri Askins is the lieutenant governor – she has killed a GOP attempt to lock Oklahoma's courthouses in favor of corporations.

Democrat Askins broke a tie to help Senate Democrats block consideration of a horrible workers compensation amendment in the state Senate.

The amendment, authored by Senate Judiciary Committee Co-Chairman James A. Williamson would have required Senate confirmation of gubernatorial appointments of judges to the Workers Compensation Court.

Has Williamson ever heard of the three branches of government? Time and again the Legislature – under both Democrats and Republicans – have sought to undermine executive authority. That's why Oklahoma has the weakest governor of any state.

The current Workers Comp Court is not stacked with judges who are anti-business and pro-trial lawyer. Check the record.

We're proud that Lt. Gov. Askins and Senate Democrats chose to put the interests of ordinary litigants ahead of corporate shills.

We have checked with numerous legal authorities – the Worker's Comp Court is working very well.

The other Republican lie is that there is a blizzard of lawsuits. That's flatly wrong. Again, check the record.

Inheritance

With Oklahoma phasing out the inheritance tax, those with estates need to know that legacy planning is about more than simply leaving your money to your kids.

If you want to make sure to pass on your values as well as your portfolio, you have to think beyond dollars and cents to teach your children how to handle the money that they will eventually inherit.

Many people, however, focus solely on building assets, forgetting the impact that inherited wealth will have on the next generation. One reason:

It's easier to deal with the technical aspects of wealth transfer than to craft a multigenerational approach to family money.

Demographic trends are prompting more people to rethink that strategy. According to studies by the Center on Wealth and Philanthropy at Boston College, at least \$41 trillion in the U.S. will pass to the next generation by 2055.

For many, the biggest worry is that a substantial inheritance may deprive their kids of important personal challenges.

Whether you have \$50 billion or \$50,000, you can help shape your children's understanding of the responsibilities that come with money. Do it.

Immigration

Wonder why so many in the business community are worried about the impact of the state's new immigration law?

The myth that all immigrants do is grunt work is false. Many are highly skilled, from framing to concrete work.

It is estimated that 50,000 in the state illegally have headed out – many going to Texas where there is no equivalent of House Bill 1804.

Especially hard-hit: Western Oklahoma. Texas County is 39% Hispanic, Harmon County 25%, Cimarron County 20%, Tillman County 19%.

The real failure is in Congress, both parties lacking the courage to pass a decent immigration bill.

It would make more sense for Oklahoma to craft a guest worker program than a criminal program. But nobody ever accused our Legislature of having sense.

Earning Money

Another Oklahoma school year is drawing to a close and once again



the dropouts will proliferate – some expelled, some bored, some tired of NCLB tests and poor kids willing to work for the minimum wage.

You don't often hear, "When I grow up, I want to be a retail salesperson." Yet the U.S. Department of Labor projects that between 2004 and 2014, there will be 736,000 openings for retail sales people, the most of any occupation in the country.

The average hourly earnings in June 2007 for a retail sales position were \$14.42, according to the National Compensation Survey released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

This survey also reports that earnings for U.S. civilian workers averaged \$19.29 per hour in June 2006.

Of the more than 8.8 million jobs represented by the top 30 growth positions, 68% pay less than the \$19.29 average wage. Many pay significantly less.

You don't need a college degree to be a retail salesperson and most individuals performing this work acquire the necessary skills through short-term on-the-job training.

Many of the jobs being generated are for unskilled positions such as retail salespeople, waiters, cashiers, and food preparation and service workers, including fast food.

Of the Top 10 occupations with the most openings between 2004 and 2014, only two require a degree: Registered nurses and post-secondary teachers.

The most common educational program for registered nurses is an associate's degree. Professors usually have a doctorate.

In the past, earnings have tended to track closely to a worker's educational attainment.

An advanced degree will net an average of \$1,200 per week, a bachelor's degree \$960 a week, some college or associate's degree \$690 a week, high school graduates \$590 a week, and dropouts \$410 a week.

We mention this because this may be the year Oklahoma gets a graduation coach law – designed to help kids stay in school and realize more of the American dream.

Backfire

Florida and Michigan Democratic whining was maddening since they deliberately chose to ignore the national

party, losing their chance to send voting delegates to this summer's Democratic National Convention.

The Democratic Party established clear rules about when states could hold primaries to prevent the chaos of states all rushing to vote first.

Officials in Florida and Michigan, jealous of the attention Iowa and New Hampshire get, defiantly moved up their primaries to January.

True to their word, party officials refused to seat renegade states' delegates.

Democratic presidential candidates agreed not to campaign in either state. Now both states' governors are complaining about their voters being "disenfranchised," and they're clamoring for a second chance to hold valid primaries.

They have no one to blame but themselves.

Bush Legacy

Hey, a billion here, a billion there, who's counting? Not the State Department, which admits it can't say "specifically what it received" for the \$1.2 billion it paid DynCorp, ostensibly to train the Iraqi police.

Of course the Democrats, after some pussyfooting, will sign off, as they have for the rest of the wasted billions that will have been allotted for the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

Would some leading Democrat respond to Bush's war? Instead, Democrats tried to show that a mere 40 days of the cost of the Iraq war could provide annual health insurance coverage for 10 million U.S. children.

Senate Leader Harry Reid added that the money might be better spent for law enforcement, homeland security and fixing the sagging infrastructure, but his argument isn't going to get any better traction than House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's.

As Reid pointed out, "This intractable civil war in Iraq is being paid for by borrowed money."

What if the Chinese sold their holdings in our debt? Or Saudi Arabia? The war has been successfully marketed as a financial freebie but it isn't.

Leave it to the next generation to wake up to discover that this war [in constant dollars] has already cost more than the Korean or Vietnam wars with no end in sight.

What a legacy.

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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

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry for his veto of a malicious abortion bill, even though he knew it would be overridden. It did not provide for rape, incest or the life of the mother. A person using RU 486 would have their name sent to a state agency.

While taxes were being cut \$700 million, already 50th in tax burden, a national survey shows Oklahoma kids are 47th in overall children's health, 37th in prenatal care, 44th in child poverty.

Dart: To the Defense Department for refusing to report on American soldiers wounded. Thanks to an investigation by CBS News, they totaled 31,590 through April 1. Many include lost limbs.

It's official. Magnet schools, charter schools, tuition tax credits and vouchers are a nationwide flop in raising test scores. They also contribute to resegregation. [Education Policy Research. Education Week, 3.20.08]

Laurel: To State Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, honored with the TRIO Achievement Award for his vigorous role in improving education. He's often a lonely Senate voice.

Your tax dollar at work – The IRS is losing millions by using private debt collectors to pursue tax scofflaws. Private collectors were paid more than \$1 billion but collected a total of \$49 million so far. [Washington Post]

Dart: To OETA, the public TV channel, for a bumbling, embarrassing call-in show, The People's Business. It has more glitches than a George Bush speech.

Department of Human Services is so badly underfunded, numerous DHS employees are on food stamps and one county director says the employee turnover last year was 100%.

Laurel: To a handful of Democrats voting against welfare payments [\$4 million a year for 15 years] for the SuperSonics. It won't be a standstill budget for them.

Standstill state budget? State leaders may call it that but the effect will be extremely harmful for key agencies. They are reaping the whirlwind of \$700 million in GOP tax cuts signed by a Democratic governor.

Dart: To Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson, R-OKC, for her killing of the appointment of State Education Board Nominee Larry Adair. Wilcoxson is easily the most sickeningly partisan member of the Senate.

Rightwing nut Starr Parker [dumped from TV's The View] was a recent speaker at OKC's Council of Public Affairs. She is a fervent supporter of vouchers – a sure way to cripple public education.

Laurel: To Lawrence Bell Jr., and James McBane, named Corrections Officers of the Year. Both were recognized by the Legislature. Corrections is 600 guards short, with no help from state leaders.

We heartily applaud Rep. Susan Winchester, R-Chickasha, for her proposed performance audit of the Department of Human Services. It was killed because some don't want to know the truth.

Dart: To Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for a wholly unnecessary bill supposedly to give public school students religious freedom. Check the textbook story in this issue. Prayer is already legal.

Slow down in work zones! Last year 53 workers were killed in work zones, despite being well marked. Many others were injured or crippled.

Dart: To Chuck Mills, a businessman who wrote an op-ed for the Daily Disappointment wherein he criticized our "failing" public schools. It is people like him who give new meaning to the word "Okie."

More than 500 Oklahomans between ages 18-64 die each year for lack of health insurance and can't otherwise get care, according to a survey by Families USA.



Laurel: To Rodney Johnson, a line medic for a Lawton Ambulance Service, going floor to floor at the Capitol for HJR 1014. Oklahoma has lost 50 ambulance services in the past few years, particularly hurting rural communities.

In an OETA appearance, Rep. Tad Jones, R-Claremore, chairman of the House Education Committee, said he favors vouchers, but he and Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, euphemistically call them "scholarships."

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, voting against the Foreclosure Prevention Act. The vote was 92-6. Without that help, 20,000 Sooners will lose their homes within two years.

Yale and Columbia universities linked up to rate the environmental performance of 66 nations – water, sanitation, habitat protection, greenhouse gases, pollution, etc. America came in dead last. [Newsweek, April 14]

Laurel: To Amy Caswell Roff, new executive director of Safe Kids Oklahoma. She is a former AmeriCorps member.

Oklahoma can reduce drunk driving deaths by 150 by cracking down on sales to youthful drivers. Last year 4,500 alcohol and drug related deaths occurred in Oklahoma.

Dart: To the fanatics who are trashing state Sen. Harry Coates, R-Seminole, for his remarkable stand against the anti-business portion of the new immigration law.

We're sick of politicians claiming we should stop throwing money at public education. Let's try it one time and if it doesn't work we will go on to something else. Oklahoma is 47th in per pupil expenditures.

Laurel: To Kerr Center President Jim Horne, marking his 36th year with the Kerr Center, Oklahoma's superb sustainable agriculture center, respected nationwide.

No fib is beyond telling by Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore. During his successful House push for an English Only amendment he said Oklahoma may have to provide translators for 120 different languages.

Dart: To Rep. Guy Liebmann, R-OKC, sorry excuse for a legislator who refused to let Cherokee Chief Chad Smith speak at a hearing. Hey chief, why are you a registered Republican?

Oklahoma has hit a record number of Academic Scholars this year – 2,358 seniors. Scholars must have at least a 3.7 grade average, a composite ACT score of 27 or 1,220 on the SAT.

Laurel: To Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, for his bill to close the loophole that allows some state workers to obtain greater retirement benefits than they ever earned monthly.

Oklahoma is the laughingstock of the English speaking world as the result of the Court of Criminal Appeals ruling dropping a peeping Tom charge against a man using a camera to look up skirts because a Target store is not a "private" place.

Dart: To the ACLU and Reps. Mike Shelton and Jabar Shumate for their fight against an anti-affirmative action petition. Circulators asked the State Supreme Court to kill the petition.

Republicans can't put enough chokeholds on abortion but they killed Rep. Scott Inman's amendment to require child support from conception. Inman, D-Del City, said it is Republican hypocrisy.

Laurel: To 81% of slowly awakening Americans who now say the country is on the wrong track under the Bush regime – up for 69% a year ago and 35% in 2002.

Bravo for House Democrats for their walkout protesting the autocratic committee rule of such bush league dictators such as Rep. Ron Peterson, R-Broken Arrow.

Dart: To the corrupt Bush Justice Department, still sitting on 50 cases of big business bribery and fraud. The FBI did its work but Justice has yet to prosecute – some cases are three years old.

The Tulsa World's Omer Gillham and Curtis Killman won the Genesis Award from the Humane Society for their first rate series on Oklahoma puppy mills. The dogs in the Legislature killed Rep. Lee Denny's bill to regulate them.

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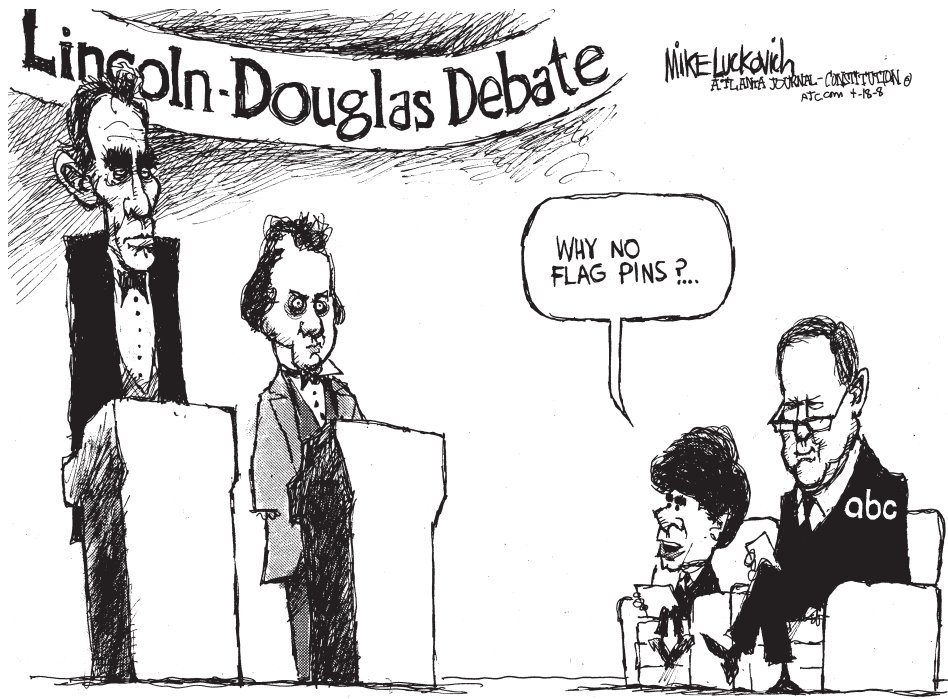
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Letters



Editor, The Observer:

April brings spring showers and it also brings income tax time. As I have done for many years I grudgingly wrote a check to the IRS. And as usual I grumbled as I signed the check. Then I reconsidered a minute and suddenly had a change of attitude. Maybe I feel good about paying taxes. I remembered all the good things taxes have bought for me through the years, a real bargain for what I paid in and what I received in return.

Taxes paid for the public schools that provided me with an education that enabled me to make a decent living, raise a family and, yes, pay taxes. I grew up during in the Great Depression when few paid income tax because few had any income.

Taxes have provided me with the world's greatest government and many freedoms the rest of the world does not enjoy including freedom of speech that allows us to carp about our government, the freedom of press that allows me to write this article and the list goes on and on.

Then some of the shine comes off my thoughts when I think of the billions of our tax dollars going to finance a senseless, endless war in Iraq while we are bogged in an economic quagmire, homes being foreclosed, huge employee layoffs and countless thousands without healthcare. The list is long, heart wrenching and disgusting.

This is an election year and again we hear the usual battle cry of many politicians. "If I am elected, I will cut taxes." President Bush's tax cutting trickle down economic theory is a financial disaster that is on the threshold of plunging us into a depression that will make the 1930s Great Depression look like payday.

So this election we voters should be leery of any candidate who makes tax cuts a top priority. According to authorities, most tax cuts only benefit the very wealthy. Let's carefully examine each candidate, regardless of political party affiliation, before we vote.

Stoney Hardcastle
Wilburton

Editor, The Observer:

You've covered it for years [and I appreciate your resolve], but I don't know how you've stood it – the Oklahoma Legislature. Taken as a group they are pretty decent folks. However, "political correctness" is no substitute for fundamental intelligence.

It is my pleasure to know a broad cross-section of people, some with high IQ's, others never tested; but

sadly, I must report that I know very few folks with high JQ: Judgment Quotient.

For those who may have missed it there are three "cornerstones" that bind a nation together [diverse or otherwise]. These facts are reflected historically and contemporarily. First: Common Law. Second: Common Currency. And third: Common Language.

These are functional priorities of government, religion, family and commerce. It is self-evident that any variation leaves a society and its citizens at a disadvantage in addressing issues of their day. Whether the elected representatives of the citizenry have the "will" to solve and implement solutions facing this or any nation is another matter entirely.

Therefore, when the Oklahoma Legislature moves to recognize English [actually American] as our legal language I support them without reservation.

The only sad part [as covered by OETA] was to see Chief Chad Smith misunderstand the committee rules of procedure. I've never observed him to be a "grandstander" and hope that was not his purpose. It was simply embarrassing for the elected leader of a great native people to be in such a position.

There will be time and opportunity for debate and this codification of language may [as I understand it] be submitted to a direct vote of Oklahomans.

Larry D. Dobie
Claremore

Editor, The Observer:

If you missed the Democratic presidential debate on ABC, Editor & Publisher called it "perhaps the most embarrassing performance by the media in a major presidential debate in years."

Moderators George Stephanopoulos and Charlie Gibson spent the first 50 minutes obsessed with distractions that only political insiders care about – gaffes, polling numbers, the stale Rev. Wright story, and the old-news Bosnia story. And, channeling Karl Rove, they directed a video question to Barack Obama asking if he loves the American flag or not. Seriously!

I signed a petition to ABC and other media that says: "Debate moderators abuse the public trust every time they ask trivial questions about gaffes and 'gotchas' that only political insiders care about. Enough with the distractions – ABC and other networks must focus on issues that affect people's daily lives."

Want to sign it too? Go to http://pol.moveon.org/enoughdistractions/?r_by=-7028548-8uUtxO&rc=paste. We need a bunch of signers for ABC to take this concern seriously.

Darla Reynolds Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

I didn't think it was possible but they've done it! After a hard target search of every nursing home and assisted living facility in the country, the Republicans have come up with a presidential nominee even older than Reagan.

Remember when they nominated that decrepit Bob Dole to run against Bill Clinton? Grandpa Dole went straight from the presidential campaign to those "icky" Viagra commercials. Say what you will about the Democrats, you'll never see Bill Clinton doing a Viagra commercial.

I know it will be difficult, and they will resist with all fury, but the Republicans have got to look to the future at some point and come into the 21st Century, but not this year. They have hitched their covered wagon to Pappy McBush. The DNC must be so pleased. What a gift! A wrinkled gift, but still.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

Re: "Wall's Tumbling Down?" [3.25.08], third paragraph: "... taking aim at the wall separating church and state, hoping to establish a Christian theocracy ..."

I believe in separation of church and state. I don't want the government telling me what religion to practice or not to practice.

However, I fail to understand why a reference to God is so often interpreted as a "Christian" reference. God is not specifically Christian.

To acknowledge the Superior being we refer to as God is not equal to the establishment of a state religion. It seems some elements in our society are becoming paranoid about the word "God."

I like your stated credo: "... to love, to work, to be themselves, to become whatever thing their vision and humanity can combine to make them ..." That seems compatible with allowing a child to express him or herself freely in an essay or piece of art at school without censure because it might include the child's religious belief.

For a child to include a religious

symbol or statement in an open assignment does not impose religion on any other student. However, a teacher should not require religious statement to be a part of any assignment.

I say, Let's keep church and state separate, and let's keep paranoia and freedom of expression separate. Let a child or adult be free to be who they are within the guidelines of being civil.

Meryl Johnson
Holdenville

Editor, The Observer:

So far, Bush and Co. have warred, tax cut, borrowed, outsourced and privatized our country into the worst conditions, financial and otherwise, since the Great Depression. [Some of us are already living in a depression-ary state.] Of course, if you are a member of Bush's base, the "Haves" and "Have Mores," everything is just fine and dandy.

Could it be possible that dud – excuse me – Dub and his handlers' original intent was to dismantle/destroy our society? And if so, to what end?

We seem to be moving toward a two-class society: The very, very rich and the very, very poor. By some definitions we are already a Third World nation.

One thing we can be certain of: The "bozos" in Washington, not to mention OKC, will never tax cut themselves out of a paycheck.

It seems the words "Bush" and "martial law" are appearing in the same sentence more often lately; if McCain is elected, it could very well be the same thing.

Tom Ellis
Okeene

Editor, The Observer:

The League of Conservation Voters released its annual scorecard, which rates legislators based on their votes on issues of environmental significance.

The LCV scorecard has its critics, but it's nonetheless become something of a gold standard when measuring how "green" a lawmaker is.

The first big story that emerges from this year's scorecard:

Sen. Barack Obama: 67%.
Sen. Hillary Clinton 73%.
Sen. John McCain 0%.

If you want someone who doesn't give a damn about the environment, vote for John McCain.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

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Frosty's Notebook

Guns

These days news reports can make any Oklahoman feel unsafe upon leaving home. Stories abound about shootings in a shopping mall, at a major university, in schools and even in a church.

The public wonders where the guns came from and whether they were purchased illegally.

Don't tell the NRA or its Sooner affiliate, the Oklahoma Rifle Association, but new research in *The Economic Journal* show the war on illegal gun use is not hopeless nor onerous. [The definitive word on the Second Amendment will come soon from the U.S. Supreme Court.]

Tightening restrictions on illegal gun sales in some cities has actually lessened gun use by criminals.

No, I'm not anti-gun. I own a Smith & Wesson 38 and if you break into my house I'll make your day. Why? Because home invasions are not infrequent in greater Oklahoma City.

The new study focused on the underground gun market in two neighborhoods in Chicago but it could have been conducted in Oklahoma City or Tulsa with the same results.

Authorities there have laid down unusually tough restrictions on handgun purchases and placed a high priority on prosecuting individuals using illegal guns. Are Oklahoma DAs listening?

The research revealed that the difficulty involved in procuring guns significantly impaired access to them by kids and criminals.

Philip Cook, professor at Duke University's Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy and co-author of the study, said one effect of the gun emphasis in law enforcement is to limit the involvement of gangs and drug dealers in selling guns.

In Oklahoma, that would come as a relief to law enforcement since urban gang members now number more than 10,000 – some of them extremely violent.

One exception the study found is that gang members were better connected to big-time gun runners and sources outside of Chicago, and were able to obtain firearms more easily. However, gang leaders carefully controlled the dissemination of the weapons.

The Holocaust Museum

I wasn't sure I was up to visiting the Holocaust Memorial Museum on a recent weekend in Washington. I've had so many recent losses in my life – my beloved wife Helen, my Mom, my brother Johnny.

I was with my daughter Marti who would be leaving from Washington for Africa where she's a member of a legal team restarting the justice system in Liberia.

I entered the museum with trepidation. After all, as a boy I had been at the movies when Pathe news shorts were showing the horrible concentration camps.

I was handed an ID card of Miksa Deutsch, a Romanian who had moved to Hungary where he was conscripted into the Hungarian slave labor service. On Nov. 10, 1944, he died in the Mauthausen concentration camp. He was 47.

I'm so glad I went. There were hundreds of school kids who entered with our group, chatting and laughing. Some said it was a class assignment and they had Holocaust workbooks to fill.

Once inside, reliving the horror of genocide, I nudged Marti. I noted that the kids were suddenly silent. All you could hear were whispers.

One employee at the museum, Sara Bloomfield, told of a sad African-American boy who came over and lingered. She said she put an arm around him. He looked up and said, "You know, lady, I never knew white folk had troubles, too."

"That speaks to our lesson here – our common humanity," she said.

Schools' Real Problem

Nobody wants to talk about the most serious problem in public education. We're living through the worst parenting in the history of the country.

No, not all parents are irresponsible, but about a third make the grade, sending kids to school who are undisciplined – regardless of the affluence of the family.

Some years ago the Legislature took a serious look at the problem but to little avail. One quote from that study stands out:

If you allow your dog to run loose, you are fined and held responsible.

If your dog seriously injures someone, you are not only financially responsible, you can also be criminally charged.

Why aren't we held as responsible for our children? Don't our children deserve supervision and discipline as much as our dogs?

Violent juvenile crime is on the rise, increasing 162% in the past decade. The present juvenile justice system is unable to stem the tide, while too many parents seem unwilling or unable to control their children.

Every 10 minutes a child is arrested on a drug offense in the U.S. Every 40 minutes a child is arrested for drunken driving. Every day students try to bring guns to school.

Since 1988, teenage boys have been more likely to die from gunshot wounds than from all natural causes combined.

A recent legislative study of gangs in Oklahoma revealed more than 10,000 members – some of them extremely violent.

Authorities are seeking funding for a special facility for violence prone young inmates at the Sand Springs facility for youthful offenders.



"They would have an arsenal where they would stash the guns, and then pass them out when needed, with clear instructions on how to use them," explains Cook. "Then they would take them back."

Researchers also looked at U.S. Department of Justice data from previous interviews with samples of arrestees in 22 cities.

They found that illegal gun markets in large cities with restrictions and enforcement policies like Chicago followed the same pattern.

Could this mean that a strong law-enforcement priority on getting rid of illegal guns could reduce gun use in crime? Of course – and it would not interfere with today's legal right to own a firearm.

Most Oklahomans applauded the decision in the state Senate not to bring up the asinine House-passed bill to let certain individuals carry guns on college campuses.

Word at the Capitol was that Timothy McVeigh, one-time decorated combat soldier and the Murrah building bomber, would have qualified. That isn't necessarily so but it makes a good point by putting a human face on the issue.

The gun culture is alive and well in Oklahoma but there should be strong enforcement of gun laws and a continuing campaign to keep them out of the hands of criminals, gangs and the mentally ill.

Every year, the freshman class at the Naval Academy visits. They look not only at history but also at the failures of the German military not living up to their ideals. America was complicit in the continuing mass murders when both the Pope and FDR refused to intervene.

I sat through films documenting the Holocaust. All deniers should visit before uttering their drivel. Six million human beings were sacrificed on the altar of Adolph Hitler's white supremacy.

It included thousands of children born with birth defects, thousands of gay people and a small army of Catholic and other clergymen.

Teenage girls emerging from the film put their arms around each other and sobbed.

In the main exhibit the hundreds of young people remained quiet and subdued.

The museum documents man's inhumanity to man through history. Every American, beginning at the earliest age, should visit the museum. Genocide continues to this good day in Darfur and other areas in the world in which we share.

Being Irish, I admit I teared up. It is an emotional feeling that has to be experienced to fully appreciate. Please go.

Imagine, just 50 years ago teachers' No. 1 complaint about their students was "talking out of turn." Today it is not uncommon for a teacher to be cursed in class or physically assaulted.

More than 80% of the children born during the baby boom grew up in families with two biological parents married to each other. Today, fewer than 50% of the children can expect to do the same.

Broken families are more likely to live in poverty. Ten percent of two-parent families are in poverty, while one half of all single-parent families live below the poverty line.

An estimated 50% of divorced fathers in Oklahoma have to be tracked down for court-ordered child support, and 80% of women who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children do so for lack of child support.

Of course not all single parent families fall in the same category, but that's no reason to ignore the problem.

The Department of Human Services and the adult and juvenile correctional systems are strapped for lack of funding while the Legislature continues its tax cutting spree – more than \$700 million to date.

The Bush Administration has contributed to the problem here and across the country, taking 100,000 cops off the streets and killing after-school program funding.

We think we can't lose this country. The foundation of a great country is strong families. When we lose them, we lose the America so many have fought and died for.

No More Spin: It's A House Divided

By Arnold Hamilton

So much for Speaker Chris Benge's more open, collegial House.

The wingnuts in the Republican caucus are firmly in control once again, stifling debate with impunity and force-feeding their far-out legislative agenda via parliamentary trickery.

The kinder, gentler House that Benge promised collapsed recently when all 44 Democrats staged a brief walkout, showing their disgust with Republican heavy-handedness that House Minority Leader Danny Morgan said "borders on a dictatorship."

Somewhere, former GOP Speakers Todd Hiett and Lance Cargill must be smiling.

DEMOCRATS UNITED OVER MISTREATMENT

The walkout came the morning after two contentious committee meetings. Without allowing discussion, Republicans in the House Judiciary and Public Safety Committee substituted a 133-page "tort reform" package for a four-page rural hospital bill and rejected a measure in the House Economic Development and Financial Services Committee that would have required insurance companies to cover costs related to autism.

It also came one week after Rep. Guy Liebmann, R-OKC, chairman of the General Government and Transportation Committee, refused to allow Cherokee Nation Chief Chad Smith to speak in opposition to the wingnuts' English-only initiative.

House Democrats have two beefs, both legitimate:

- First, not only is the general public – at the whim of the committee chair – being denied the right to speak in "public" committee hearings, but also legislators themselves are being silenced, thwarted from asking questions or debating issues.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS RULE BY FIAT

- Second, House rules are set up so that GOP chairs are now the sole arbiters of whether amendments are germane to specific legislation.

House rules are supposed to prohibit rolling separate and discrete subjects into a single piece of legislation.

When an amendment is submitted on the House floor, lawmakers can challenge whether it is germane. If the speaker rules it is, a lawmaker who disagrees with the ruling can demand – with the support of 15 others – the entire House vote on the matter.

If an amendment is submitted in committee, however, the chair decides whether it is germane – a ruling that cannot be appealed in committee or later on the House floor.

In the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Rex Duncan, R-Sand Springs, ruled the tort reform language was germane to the rural hospital bill. Never mind that civil procedure is found in a different section of Oklahoma law.

Tort reform – essentially locking the courthouse door to ordinary Oklahomans

Partisan Wilcoxson Kills Good Nominee

Once again partisanship has reared its ugly head in the Oklahoma Senate – this time under the aegis of the Senate's worst partisan, Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson.

State Sen. Kenneth Corn said he was embarrassed that the Senate Education Committee failed to approve the nomination of a former Speaker of the House.

The nomination of Larry Adair to the State Board of Education died in a straight party line vote of 7-7 engineered by Wilcoxson.

"This is a slap in the face to a man who has devoted his entire life to helping Oklahoma. He's a former educator who dedicated himself to building a better future for our young people, and he brought that dedication with him to the state Legislature," said Corn, D-Poteau.

IT WAS PURE PARTISAN POLITICS

"Instead of taking advantage of his experience and lifelong desire to help Oklahoma's children, Republicans serving on that committee decided to play partisan politics."

Corn said one of the objections was over bills that were not heard when Adair was Speaker of the House.

"That's like us holding Sen. Glenn Coffee responsible for all the bills that weren't heard in the state Senate. Committee chairmen also make those decisions – it's not all controlled by the leaders of either chamber," Corn said.

"I also know for a fact that Speaker Adair supported language for open transfer and charter schools while he was still in the Legislature."

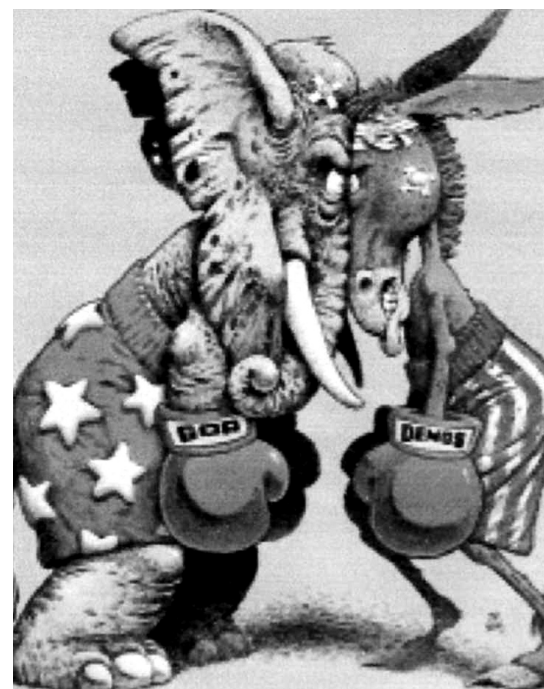
In other words, Wilcoxson deliberately lied about Adair's voting record. Corn said he also disagreed that the nomination was in violation of state law.

"First of all, that's just one interpretation of what the law says. There have been times in the past we've approved nominations, particularly to the OSU Board of Regents, that some argued were in violation of the law, but those have held, and Democrats voted to change the law to help enable Burns Hargis to become president of OSU at an earlier date," Corn said.

A FLAWED LEGAL INTERPRETATION

"Yet in this instance, Senate Republicans are using their interpretation as an excuse to deny the nomination of one of the best qualified individuals we could possibly have. I think it's really a black eye for the state Senate and a loss for Oklahoma school children," Corn said.

Term-limited Wilcoxson, running at breakneck speed for State Superintendent, had the gall to praise Adair "for his contribution to our state."



who have been wronged – is the Holy Grail for the reactionary right. Duncan marched in lockstep, basically ruling it was germane because he said so.

HARDLY A ROUTINE, PARTISAN SKIRMISH

Don't be misled into thinking this is just so much inside baseball, a typical parliamentary skirmish between partisans. What is taking place in some House committees meets the definition of fascism.

House Democratic leaders met with Benge to discuss the matter, asking for specific rules changes to ensure democracy is not stifled. Benge thought about it over the weekend and punted – opting to wait until next year to decide what action, if any, was warranted.

Democrats responded by voting en masse against the emergency clause on select measures, preventing them from becoming law immediately, if they cleared all the hurdles.

The sad thing is, Benge is a nice guy. A conservative, yes. But not mean-spirited. He's always been willing to let opponents be heard. And unlike some of his wingnut colleagues, he doesn't think he's smarter than everybody else or that he's on a religious crusade to remake Oklahoma in what he considers to be God's image.

Unfortunately, Benge's speakership is a captive of the House's reactionary right, the old Hiett-Cargill cabal that is so convinced of the righteousness of its cause that it's willing to steamroll anybody or anything in its path, including children with autism.

Most House speakers rule with an iron fist. The committee chairs do what the speaker commands – or else. Benge meekly demurs to his committee chairs, saying repeatedly they're given "certain discretion" in conducting committee business.

A month remains in the legislative session. How Benge handles matters the rest of the way will determine whether he's a token, caretaker speaker – or a speaker to remember.

This is the same Wilcoxson who referred to State Superintendent Sandy Garrett as "state stupidtendent."

She is a passionate supporter of vouchers to de-fund public education and has taken shots at public education at every opportunity. She has yet to crusade to get Oklahoma above 47th in per pupil expenditure.

We can't think of a worse thing that could happen to Oklahoma's public schools than Wilcoxson as state superintendent. It would be the moral equivalent of naming George Bush as president of Harvard.

Follow The Money

Legislative leaders are thumping their chests, touting the "generous" 30% budget increase for the state Ethics Commission. Don't buy the spin. It's an insulting example of the old legislative shell game.

The Ethics Commission requested \$906,000 for next year in order to be fully funded, as the state Constitution demands. The Legislature offered \$667,000 or about \$150,000 more than the current budget.

The increase came with strings attached: Lawmakers are demanding that \$50,000 of the new money be spent on a software system the Ethics Commission not only doesn't want or need, but also isn't compatible with their current programs.

Further, the other \$100,000 was earmarked for computer upgrades and operating expenses. The Ethics Commission's seven-member staff is overwhelmed and underpaid – and hasn't changed in size since 1991. Things are so tight this year the commission is borrowing paper from other state agencies and commission employees are digging into their own pockets to pay for supplies.

The commission's vice chairman, John Raley, said it's time to "put an end to this annual minuet" with the Legislature over money, which amounts to the Ethics Commission "rattling our tin cup" for budgetary scraps.

The truth is, the Legislature wants an Ethics Commission in place to give the illusion of a pristine political system in Oklahoma. But it really doesn't want an Ethics Commission with any serious bite, lest too much light be shined on campaign finance and special interest gift-giving shenanigans.

DHS Recognized By National Report

By Mary Leaver

Oklahoma is ranked first in the nation for state standards and oversight of family child-care homes, according to a report card issued by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

Oklahoma is the only state that meets 75 of the basic requirements needed to ensure children are in care that safeguards their health and safety and promotes development and learning, NACCRRRA officials said.

"Oklahoma's standards and oversight are the cumulative result of more than 40 years of work and dedication by former and current leadership within the Oklahoma Legislature, Child Care Advisory Committee, Oklahoma Department of Human Services and various other agencies and individuals dedicated to protecting children as they pursue a high quality early education experience," said Mark Lewis, director, Oklahoma Child Care Services.

WHERE OVERSIGHT AND STANDARDS MEET

The child-care licensing specialists are where oversight and standards meet. Their dedication, knowledge and balanced use of authority and consultation are the keys to successful implementation. Without our licensing specialists, the standards and oversight could not be effective.

"Most impressive about this report is that Oklahoma ranked above the U.S. Department of Defense," said OKDHS Director Howard H. Hendrick. "Historically, the Defense Department has represented the gold standard of child care."

NACCRRRA, a child-care advocacy group based in Washington, DC, works with child-care resource and referral agencies in each state to help ensure access to quality child care and to improve child care standards across the country.

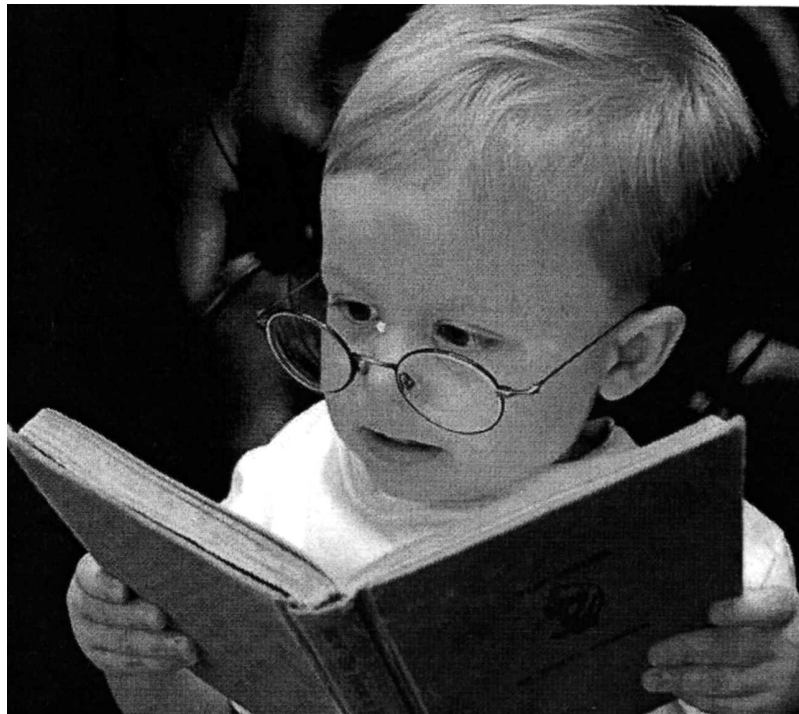
HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE OF CHILDREN

The report ranked every state, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Department of Defense on 14 different standards focused on ensuring the health, safety and well-being of children while in home-based child care programs serving six or fewer children.

The Top 10 consisted of Oklahoma, Washington, Massachusetts, the U.S. Department of Defense, Alabama, District of Columbia, Maryland, South Carolina, Colorado and Connecticut.

With approximately 3,200 family child-care homes, those child-care providers comprise the largest portion of Oklahoma's 5,100 child-care facilities.

The standards examined by NACCRRRA included frequency and type of monitoring visits; requirement of background checks, provider education, provider training, parent-provider communication and education, quality of learning envi-



ronment; availability of learning activities and literacy opportunities; group size limitations; and health and safety requirements.

15 STATES SCORE ZERO

According to the report, 15 states scored a zero because they either do not license small family child care homes, do not conduct an inspection prior to issuing a license, or allow more than six children in the home before applying state regulations.

"In addition to requiring an inspection prior to issuing a license, Oklahoma requires a minimum of three unannounced monitoring visits per year," Lewis said. "In contrast, Iowa requires visits once every five years and Michigan once every 10 years."

While the report noted Oklahoma's long list of strengths, it also pointed out areas where the state could further strengthen its standards, such as in national fingerprint checks and staff to child ratios for children under the age of 24 months.

"While we are pleased to receive this national recognition, we should also recognize there is room for improvement as we strive to keep Oklahoma a leader in early childhood care and education," Lewis said.

"We will continue to look for ways to improve," Hendrick agreed. "This report is a good overall assessment of where we are and the work we need to do to continue to get better."

In March 2006, NACCRRRA issued a report that ranked Oklahoma third in the nation for providing quality child-care oversight in child care centers.

- Inside OKDHS newsletter

High School Grads Need Less Remediation

Graduates of Oklahoma high schools posted the second-lowest college remediation rate in 10 years and also achieved a dramatic one-year decline.

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett has posted the numbers on the Oklahoma State

Department of Education's web site www.sde.state.ok.us.

The 2006 remediation rate [the most recent available] was calculated by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and was 35%. In 2005, the remediation rate was 36.7% and it was at its highest in 1998 at 40%.

"The good news is that we experienced a dramatic one-year decline in the overall college remediation rate but there is still much work to be done," Garrett said.

"We expect further declines to be made as the Achieving Classroom Excellence mandates take full effect."

The Regents have chosen to require remedial college courses, or non-credit college courses in a core subject area, for students who score below a 19 on one of the subtests of the ACT college-entrance exam.

Oklahoma is among the states that have college remediation benchmarks. Not all states do.

The majority of students who need college remediation in Oklahoma need it

in the area of mathematics. Of the 35% of Oklahoma high school graduates who were first-time freshmen in the fall of 2006 and needed remediation, 88% needed remediation in mathematics.

Garrett encouraged local school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers and parents to analyze the college remediation rates for their high schools.

"By looking at their college remediation rates and comparing those rates to how their students are performing on state End-of-Instruction exams, the ACT and the marks they are achieving in the classroom, board members, superintendents, principals teachers and parents will be able to identify where the bar needs to be raised and efforts intensified," Garrett said.

Included among the Achieving Classroom Excellence mandates are that all high school students, beginning with the Class of 2010, must pass four out of seven End-of-Instruction exams in order to graduate.

Algebra I and English II exams are mandatory and the others may be chosen from among Algebra II, Geometry I, English III, U.S. History, Biology I and Chemistry.

Some believe that the dropout rate will soar as a result of the ACE tests. Not everyone is good at math.

NOTEWORTHY

Congratulations to Tulsa native Tracy Letts, winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his widely-acclaimed tragicomedy "August: Osage County" about an Oklahoma family unraveling in the wake of its patriarch's suicide. The play opened last summer in Chicago and moved to Broadway in December. The New York Times hailed it as "the most exciting new American play Broadway has seen in years." Letts is the son of acclaimed Tulsa-based novelist Billie Letts and the late Dennis Letts, who appeared in the play both in Chicago and on Broadway. Sadly, he died Feb. 21 of cancer. Tracy Letts also was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2004 for his play "Man From Nebraska."

A May 1 deadline looms for three major grants: the Arts-in-Alternative Education Grant, the Local Government Challenge Grant and the Small Grant Support for Schools. The Arts-in-Alternative Education program, a partnership of the Oklahoma Arts Council and the State Department of Education, provides funds to assist with hands-on instruction and participation in the arts in alternative education programs in public schools. The Local Government Challenge Grant

is a matching program that encourages local governments to support the arts in their community. The Small Grant Support for Schools encourages schools to bring the arts into their classrooms. For more information, call 405.521.2931, visit the Oklahoma Art Council's website www.arts.ok.gov or e-mail okarts@arts.ok.gov.

Freedom of Information Oklahoma Inc. is urging candidates for state and local offices to sign a pledge to uphold the letter and spirit of Oklahoma's Open Meeting and Open Records laws. The candidate pledge is part of a national effort to spur public commitments to government transparency from candidates for president down to city council. "This is another step in building public awareness about open government," said Kay Boies, FOI Oklahoma president and executive director of the Oklahoma Library Association. "We hope to make open government in Oklahoma an important campaign issue in state and local elections." The pledge form is available for download at www.foioklahoma.org. Those signing the pledge will be listed on the FOI Oklahoma web site.

Diabetes Research Is OSU Initiative

The OSU Center for Health Sciences has launched a statewide clinical practice-based diabetes research initiative through a Center for Diabetes Care and Research network.

Its mission is to improve health care for diabetes patients while benefiting diabetes research. In a "win-win" partnership with patients and researchers, the center will involve primary care physicians across Oklahoma who treat diabetic patients.

In turn, physicians will be able to enroll their patients in OSU's planned diabetes studies, increasing the numbers of subjects and yielding data from a wider range of socioeconomic levels.

The research effort is one of the focus areas of OSU-CHS's translational research initiative.

RESEARCH A CONTINUUM OF CARE

Translational research is a continuum of biomedical and clinical research and health care outcomes, says project director David Wallace, Ph.D., assistant dean for research.

"The center's practice-based model will be a major benefit to diabetic patients," Wallace says.

"They will continue to see their primary care physicians throughout the course of their treatment. Once or twice each year the patients will receive educational training/updates, onsite examinations and participation in clinical studies."

Wallace believes the approach should improve understanding of this disease and its health and economic impact on the state of Oklahoma.

RESEARCH PARTNERS ARE LISTED

Among research partners are OSU-CHS academic departments and its clinic system, along with clinical and biomedical research, rural health, telemedicine, behavioral sciences, epidemiology, nutrition and clinical care.

Patients will receive diabetes education, self-management training, pharmacy services, retinal imaging, behavioral health services, nutrition information, dental hygiene and foot care.

A comprehensive diabetes care program, based on disease management principles, is a proactive approach to managing patients with chronic disease.

DISEASE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

The overall goal is to create an outcomes-based disease management program that systematically approaches patient care using evidence-based clinical guidelines.

Close collaboration between a nurse care manager with the clinic and community-based primary care physicians underlies the multidisciplinary team approach, says Judy Wickham, RN, MBA, continuous quality improvement case manager.

Each patient has a primary care physician who directs care. The multidisciplinary team works with the physician and the patient in a self-management approach to care, and monitors patients for complications.

The care manager liaisons between the patient, the physician and the center multidisciplinary team to help ensure that the individual patient has access to



the right resources.

RURAL CLINICAL COORDINATORS

In rural health in Oklahoma, the center will build upon the 93 physician preceptors and 23 hospital coordinators who are part of the OSU Center for Rural Health's rural clinical education program.

These physicians often are on the frontlines of diabetes care and can be the pathway to treatment in rural Oklahoma. Telemedicine will offer subspecialty care [cardiology, pulmonology, psychiatry and more] and consultation to rural patients in the patients' hometowns.

OSU's telemedicine network reaches more than 25 communities in the state and offers distance-learning capabilities for patients and physicians.

If no clinic site is available, OSU's Mobile Telemedicine Clinic can provide real-time interactive examinations, ultrasound, electrocardiogram, spirometry, vital sign monitoring, retinal eye scans/pictures and dermatology screening. Some procedures, such as ultrasound, can be stored and forwarded at a later time to the specialist if needed.

RURAL ACCESS TO PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

"The diabetes center will further support the overarching mission of the Center for Rural Health by providing access to primary care for rural Oklahomans," says William Pettit, DO, OSU associate dean for rural health.

Wallace says base-line data could reveal problem areas such as genetic factors and metabolic changes that point to targeted research projects.

"We do not want to exclude any population of patients and will be able to retrospectively examine the data to help guide the direction of future studies," he adds.

Tracking patients over time will allow comparisons of multiple socioeconomic, genetic, nutritional and physical factors. From a research view, this will help minimize bias and will generate a more accurate data representation of the diabetic populations being examined.

The long-term goal of the center is to develop into the premier diabetes care and research center in the region.

Agritourism Boom Hitting Oklahoma

Agritourism in Oklahoma and across America gets even more interesting when you look at current facts and reasons it has become so popular.

Here are facts from *Tourism Works for America*, 13th Annual Edition, published by the Travel Industry Association of America.

Sixty-three million Americans [ages 16 years and older] visit farms annually, according to a survey taken by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Resources Conservation Service.

This estimate excludes the millions of children who visited farms for various activities like pumpkin picking, spring planting and summer camp trips.

STATES SHOW LARGE INCOME HIKES

States involved in agritourism have seen large income increases from agritourism. For example, a 2002 Vermont agritourism survey showed that about one-third of its state farmers received income from agritourism that reached a total of \$20 million.

Guest ranches have seen an increase over the last couple of years, according to the Dude Ranchers' Association. Dude ranches offer western experiences in settings with a livestock-oriented way of life.

Family reunions are on the rise for guest ranches, along with specialty weeks such as singles, adults only, mother-daughter, photography, fall foliage, artists, etc.

RANCHERS ARE LURING TOURISTS

Many ranches now are hosting conferences and team building events during their shoulder seasoning and association members note increased visits by significant numbers of non-traditional groups such as grandparents with grandchildren, single parents who only have the children for a limited time, honeymooners and multigenerational family reunions.

The Travel Industry Association states that more than half of the traveling American public considers it important to experience or learn about cultures other than their own when they travel.

The term "geotourism" is often used interchangeably with "ecotourism," which is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment

See AGRITOURISM Page 15

Activities in Oklahoma by U.S. Residents

FISHING

Anglers.....	774,000
Days of fishing.....	12,741,000
Average days per angler.....	16
Total expenditures.....	\$476,019,000
Trip-related expenditures.....	\$212,235,000
Equipment and other expenditures.....	\$263,784,000
Average expenditure per angler.....	\$609
Average trip expenditure per day.....	\$17
Trip and equipment expenditures by nonresidents in Oklahoma.....	\$31,342,000

HUNTING

Hunters.....	261,000
Days of hunting.....	5,642,000
Average days per hunter.....	22
Total expenditures.....	\$284,071,000
Trip-related expenditures.....	\$96,942,000
Equipment and other expenditures.....	\$187,129,000
Average expenditure per hunter.....	\$1,086
Average trip expenditure per day.....	\$17
Trip and equipment expenditures by nonresidents in Oklahoma.....	\$6,167,000

WILDLIFE WATCHING

Total wildlife-watching participants.....	1,131,000
Nonresidential.....	403,000
Residential.....	997,000
Total expenditures.....	\$193,248,000
Trip-related expenditures.....	\$69,211,000
Equipment and other expenditures.....	\$124,038,000
Average expenditure per participant.....	\$171

Trip and equipment expenditures by nonresidents in Oklahoma.....\$33,030,000

Sonics Deal A Real Stinker for Oklahoma

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

The National Basketball Association has announced the Seattle SuperSonics will relocate to Oklahoma City once the team's legal problems in Seattle are resolved.

Imagine that!

Oklahoma:

- Home of state Rep. Sally Kern, gay basher of national prominence;
- Worst state in the nation for child abuse deaths and 47th in the overall well-being of children, according to the Every Child Matters Education Fund, Washington DC;
- 47th in spending per public school pupil, according to a U.S. Census Bureau report;
- One of the worst places in America for hunger where one in five children is at risk of going to bed hungry [Oklahoma Task Force on Hunger];
- Where state lawmakers are noted for legislation to designate the Dutch oven as the official state cooking pot, select an official rock-and-roll song, authorize certain students to carry concealed handguns on campus, and force physicians to further brutalize victims of rape and incest by requiring an ultrasound before they can have an abortion.

WHY OKLAHOMA CITY FOR NBA?

What, then, distinguishes Oklahoma as future location of choice for the SuperSonics?

Free Lunch, by David Cay Johnston answers that question!

In this book, Johnston, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter for the New York Times, documents "how the wealthiest Americans enrich themselves at government expense [and stick you with the bill]."

Oklahoma's political leaders have been pushovers. They jumped at the chance to enrich Sonics' owners – one billionaire and several millionaires – at government expense.

For example, the Oklahoma City Council voted for a citywide election to raise \$121 million through a new one-percent sales tax on groceries, utilities and other necessities.

A MISLEADING CAMPAIGN

Voters said "yes" after an \$850,000 campaign which misled them into thinking their sales tax "would not go up" – without saying this tax would not go down,

Stadium Swindle Is Not Unique To OKC

By Dave Zirin

Editor's Note: Sports columnist Dave Zirin reports from Washington, DC, on how cities and states have been ripped off to build sports stadiums and arenas; i.e. Oklahoma City to the tune of \$121 million.

In the weeks before the state Legislature voted on funding for a new baseball stadium, the Minnesota Twins ran a TV commercial featuring a ballplayer visiting a boy in the hospital.

A voice-over announced, "If the Twins leave Minnesota, an 8-year-old from Wilmer undergoing chemotherapy will never get a visit from [Twins infielder] Marty Cordova."

It turned out that the boy had already died by the time the commercial aired. Oops!

But lying about a cancer-stricken child is small potatoes when it comes to the depths pro sports owners will sink in their drive for publicly funded stadiums.

SCAMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Pro arenas paid for on the public dime now dot the country – monuments to corporate welfare.

The process is outright extortion: A major sports owner threatens to move his or her team, and demands that city or state taxpayers put up hundreds of millions of dollars to build a stadium that may or may not be owned by the city.

Imagine if you wanted to move to a new town and demanded that your neighbors build you a home for the privilege of having you move in, and you begin to see the insane logic.

Over the last 20 years, working people in this country have paid an average of more than \$500 million a year in stadium construction and upkeep costs, for a total of more than \$7 billion spent on new facilities by 2006.

And this doesn't include the \$600 million that Washington, DC, pledged to build a baseball stadium for the Nationals.

LAYING OFF VITAL EMPLOYEES

At the time, DC had just laid off 300 public school workers, closed its only public hospital and had an infant mortality rate that is worse than every country in the Western Hemisphere except Haiti.

The site was an impoverished section of the city called the Anacostia Waterfront. Building the stadium involved destroying low-income housing and homeless shelters under what is called, without irony, "fair use."

The DC stadium swindle moved forward even though 70% of the city opposed the proposal, and more than half strongly opposed it.

These numbers crossed all ethnic and racial lines in this heavily segregated city.

MAJOR ECONOMIC BENEFITS PURE FOLLY



either.

So grandma's grocery money will help fund Sonics' fat cat skyboxes, roof gardens and other luxuries in a practically new building downtown.

I made over 5,000 calls in South OKC against this massive giveaway because it is immoral to take from the poor and give to the wealthiest in Oklahoma City – one of whom is No. 220 on the Forbes list of the 400 richest Americans.

I'm proud that voters in 40 South OKC precincts which I worked voted 56% to 44% against this gall and greed.

CORPORATE WELFARE FROM STATE, TOO

In addition, our legislative leaders rammed SB 1819 through the Legislature at lightning speed and the governor signed it. This measure requires grandma to pitch in through her income tax for quarterly "incentive" payments to the Sonics. This bounty is based on a percentage of the team's payroll and totals \$60 million over 15 years – an average of \$4 million per year – even more each year as payroll increases.

This bill passed only one day before the NBA announced that the Sonics are coming to Oklahoma City. Had the bill not whizzed through the House and Senate, it would have been obvious that it was not needed to get the Sonics.

The Preamble to the U. S. Constitution says that the role of government is to "promote the general welfare." Taking from the many to enrich the few does just the opposite.

This is not a trivial issue; it speaks to the core of who we are as a society.

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

This opposition remained consistent even though Major League owners – and their shill, DC Mayor Anthony Williams – continually sold the fiction that the stadium would provide major economic benefits. This is pure folly, not only in DC but around the country.

According to a report by the Brookings Institute, "No recent facility has earned anything approaching a reasonable return on investment. No recent facility has been self-financing in terms of its impact on net tax revenues ... The economic benefits of sports facilities are de minimus."

As Roger Noll, co-author of the book *Sports, Jobs and Taxes: The Economic Impact of Sports Teams and Stadiums*, put it, "Any independent study shows that as an investment, its silly."

IT DOES NOT CONTRIBUTE TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

"If they're trying to sell it on the grounds of actually contributing to economic growth and employment in DC, that's wrong," he said when the Nationals' stadium was debated.

"There has never been a publicly subsidized stadium anywhere in the United States that had the effect of increasing employment and economic growth in the city in which it was built."

Cleveland is another loser in the stadium swindle. This former industrial city was once used as an example for how publicly funded stadiums could turn cities around.

In 1990, Cleveland's Central Market Gateway Project promised in full-page newspaper ads that a new sports complex would generate "\$15 million a year for schools for our children."

SCHOOLS ENDED UP IN RECEIVERSHIP

Instead, the Cleveland Teachers Union calculated that tax breaks given to the project drained \$3.5 million a year from the Cleveland school system, which ended up in receivership.

Cleveland was also named the poorest big city in the U.S., with a poverty rate of 50% and unemployment hovering at 33%.

The truth is that stadiums help nobody but the sports bosses and their political cronies.

When Baltimore Ravens owner Art Modell secured funding for his \$300 million playpen, he commented – in a rare moment of candor – to reporters, "The pride and presence of a professional football team is more important than 30 libraries."

Maybe for Modell, but growing legions of people disagree.

The owners' friend in the White House wasn't good enough to be named com-

See SWINDLE Page 15

PUBLIC FORUM

Chaplain: It's Time To Get Off The Pot

By Andrea Walker-Skye

I've subscribed to the Observer for years, and I will keep doing it. But I really wish you'd get off the marijuana bandwagon. The stuff is too addictive, and causes life-damaging consequences. Don't believe me – come out to Valley Hope here in Cushing and talk to our patients.

We're a drug and alcohol addictions treatment center, and marijuana pops up for a large percentage of our patients. Or talk to folks in Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, and Al-Anon, etc., and see how many people have relapsed due to marijuana.

It, too, is a gateway drug, right behind alcohol, the biggest of all. The THC levels of street pot back in the hippie days ran 3% to 7%. These days, the poor stuff runs in the low teens, and the so-called "good stuff" runs up to 25% to 28% THC. That's the difference between near-beer and Everclear.

Yes, decriminalize the possession of it. Filling Oklahoma jails with folks for smoking it is just plain dumb, a colossal waste of law enforcement's time and taxpayers' dollars. But do not put this stuff out on the streets legally.

We're trying like crazy to get rid of tobacco, for heaven's sake, and you want to add a smoked drug that's more addictive, causes greater lung damage, and has a much greater negative effect on mood and mind?

How 'bout this bit? There's no second hand booze effect. I'm deadly allergic to hemp, in all forms. Can't even wear the cute hemp string and bead bracelet a friend made for me, makes my skin break out. As for the smoke from marijuana, it gives me hives in my lungs. I left plenty of parties in college due to it. I'm not alone. And you want to put that out in public? No thanks!

We don't need to legalize MORE dope [good God, there's enough in the medi-



cine cabinet as it is]. We don't need to criminalize more dope, either. We need to go a middle way, and reduce demand for dope, in any form. That's called recovery, sobriety, serenity, and sanity. No, I'm not a recovering addict, just related to a bunch and friends with many more. I'll support their way. They're having way too much fun to let dope or booze get in the way.

– The author is chaplain of Cushing Valley Hope

A Few Modest Proposals For W's Library

By Bill Howell

The recent announcement of Bush II's pending library, to be constructed at Southern Methodist University, caused me to reflect on the highlights of his legacy.

My initial concern, of course, was the paucity of displays that might be included. However, upon further reflection I would like to make these recommendations for the architectural design.

Specific representative displays and artifacts should be organized by professionals.

First, the entrance to the facility should reflect his initial achievement as the only president to be selected by the United States Supreme Court.

It also might reflect his presidential accomplishments, ranked with his predecessors. I suggest this would probably place him third from the bottom, above Harrison and Garfield, both who died within two months or less following their inauguration.

Entering the facility, I believe the following should capture the essence of the 43rd president:

- The largest room should reflect our national debt, perhaps depicting a chronology from 2000 to date;
- A second room, similar in size could recognize the success of his leadership in initiating the war in Iraq, a maze featuring dead-end corridors might also be included;

• A third, but much smaller room, highlighted by a neon sign reflecting the quote, "Good Job Brownie," could represent his successful efforts to address Hurricane Katrina;

• Leaving the memorial to Katrina, I suggest a one-way escalator be provided for visitors to enter the lower level or basement where the success of foreign policy and the current international image of the United States might be depicted;

• Younger visitors might enjoy a small puppet theatre that could represent the influence of the current vice president, with glass panels lining the walls. These panels might reflect the ruptured syntax of some of his more memorable speeches, a reminder of the intellectual leadership that initiated No Child Left Behind;

• Moving outside to a garden area, a wishing well might be included where visitors could toss coins that later may be collected and compassionately distributed to impoverished children;

• Finally, I suggest that a representative statue be erected somewhere near the garden exit denoting his discovery of the presidential veto following the 2006 congressional election.

As we are aware, capturing a president's legacy by building a library that commemorates the recent White House occupant's achievements is an event wherein private funds are generated to complete the task.

May I suggest Haliburton?

– The author lives in Bird Island, OK

Truth In Advertising: SB 2093 Is Voucher Bill

Editor's Note: This letter was signed by school superintendents from across Oklahoma. Despite lofty promises and perennial lip service about the importance of education, the best the tax-cut-happy Legislature could come up with for 2008-09 was a standstill budget that underfunds schools at the same miserable level as last year.

Senate Bill 2093, the so-called "New Hope Scholarship Program," is further proof that the current Republican-controlled state Legislature is in an all out attack mode on public education. The measure would give a 50% tax credit to individuals who donate to a fund providing private school scholarships. This tax credit would be on top of any charitable tax deductions donors already receive.

The Oklahoma bill creates a voucher system that would take public dollars and transfer them through the use of tax credits to private schools. The end result is still fewer resources left for those students who remain in public schools.

In the past three or four years, the Legislature has given over \$700 million to the wealthy in tax cuts. That, in a time when, education, roads and bridges, prisons and DHS are all under funded. This voucher credit is another tax cut for the wealthy.

As of April 16, schools did not have a budget allocation for next year, even though the law gives April 1st as the deadline for this to occur. What's even worse is that after two years of record collections for the state, schools have not been funded for the current year in the amount promised last session.

No doubt, public schools have room to improve, but they are certainly not as bad as the "voucher pushers" want to indicate. Our public schools are required

to teach all children. That's the rich, poor, those with special needs, and those with language barriers. Private schools have the luxury of selecting the privileged few. If the Legislature would fund schools properly [just meet the regional average for per pupil expenses] and eliminate the unfunded mandates, improvement will occur.

Passage of SB 2093 will further erode funding for public education. As vouchers expand, less funding will be available for public education. If this continues, we will see more segregation of the rich and the poor. Take away the funding for public education as well as the "elite" students and all is left for the remaining students is the "No Hope Scholarship Program."

Please contact your State Representative and State Senator and ask them to kill SB 2093.

The superintendents signing the letter:

Monte Madewell, Warner; Roger Sharp, Muldrow; Mike Garde, Muskogee; Vol Woods, Salina; Dudley Hume, Webbers Falls; Dan Collins, Westville; Jarvis Dobbs, Colbert; Rick Loggins, Barnsdall; Dr. Emit Callaway, Mannford; Marsha Norman, Beggs; Della Jones, Keystone Dependent School; Dr. John Cox, Peggs Dependent School; Derald Glover, Fort Gibson; Speedy Chaffin, Briggs Dependent School; Fred Ferguson, Shady Grove Dependent School; Gary Wade, Grandview Dependent School; Stephen Haynes, Woodall Dependent School; Randy Roundtree, Keys Dependent School; Tom Linihan, Adair; Monte Thompson, Davis; Dart Drummond, Panama; Jerry Needham, Oktaha; D.B. Merrill, Hilldale; and Dr. Landon Berry, Haskell.

BOOKS

America's Decline? It's The Economy, Stupid

By Tim Rutten

BAD MONEY

Reckless Finance, Failed Politics, and the Global Crisis of American Capitalism
By Kevin Phillips
Penguin Group
256 pages, \$25.95

Kevin Phillips' new book would be sobering enough if it were the first we'd ever heard from him.

When you take into account how often he's been right in the past, this 14th volume in his continuing commentary on the American condition becomes positively alarming.

As a senior strategist for Richard Nixon in 1968, Phillips correctly forecast the coming conservative realignment that ultimately would propel Ronald Reagan into the White House.

As a principal architect of the Republicans' "Southern strategy," he correctly foresaw a shift of influence to the "Sunbelt" and to the "new right" – two phrases he coined.

He also envisioned what we call the red state-blue state divide and accurately predicted its geography.

Twenty-five years ago, the Wall Street Journal heralded Phillips as "the leading conservative electoral analyst," but since then, he's become disenchanted with the GOP's embrace of evangelical pieties and what he calls dynastic politics and "market triumphalism."

DEMOCRATS COMPLICIT IN ECONOMIC MESS

Still, he hasn't crossed the aisle and, in *Bad Money*, he has a great deal to say about the Democrats' – particularly the Clinton Democrats' – complicity in the developing global economic crisis.

In part, this latest book is meant as a rhetorical shot across the bow of the current presidential campaign, which Phillips convincingly argues is failing to address the causes and implications of our current distress.

There's plenty of that to go around: The economic expansion that has occurred during the Bush Administration was the first in U.S. history to exclude the middle class.

Previous booms had left the poor behind, but this one was the first to benefit only the rich. Median family income is still less than it was in 1999, which makes this the longest slump ever measured in that key indicator of middle class well-being.

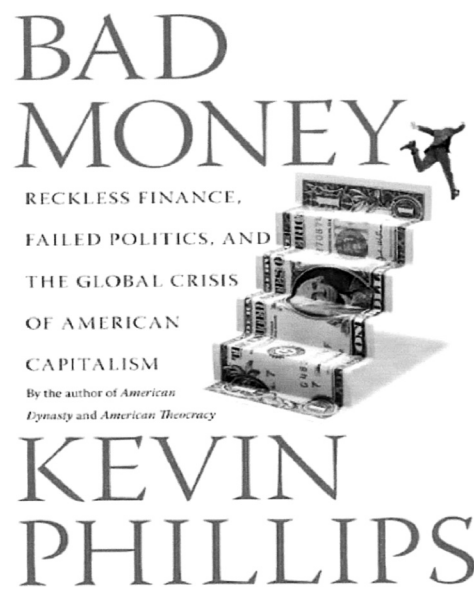
The Clinton boom was no great shakes for the great middle either: Since 1983, according to a recent survey by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, "the median net worth of upper-income families more than doubled, while the median net worth of middle-income families grew by just 29%."

GRIM NEWS: FINANCIAL SERVICES REPLACE MANUFACTURING

In this context, *Bad Money* reads as kind of an electoral *cri de coeur*: It's the economy, stupid.

Yet, for a variety of reasons, including the Clintons' close and quite obviously mutually beneficial relationship with Wall Street, Phillips doesn't hold out much hope that either party is willing to address the roots of the crisis.

The GOP's faith in markets is absolute, and the religious right's blind embrace



Is America on the cusp of the sort of financially induced decline through which Bourbon Spain, the Dutch Republic and imperial Britain once passed?

of capitalism has eliminated populist dissent from the party's internal debate. The Democrats, meanwhile, are irreparably compromised by contributions from the Wall Street bankers and hedge fund managers, who are at the center of the current global meltdown.

Phillips locates that malaise in two structural factors: Over the last three decades, financial services have expanded from 11% of America's gross domestic product to a record 21%, while manufacturing has declined from 25% to 13%.

DON'T BUY 'POST-INDUSTRIAL' MALARKEY

The author rejects the notion that this shift simply reflects a healthy adaptation to a "post-industrial" economy. Instead, he argues that the emergence of hedge funds and ever-more exotic bundles of financial derivatives amounts to a "financialization" of the American economy that has facilitated a ruinous expansion of private, as well as public, debt.

Failed energy policies – or rather, the avoidance of any policy – have made the United States vulnerable to what may be the coming peak in oil production, thereby further weakening the dollar, which is essentially backed by the global petroleum economy.

"My summation," Phillips writes, "is that American financial capitalism, at a pivotal period in the nation's history, cavalierly ventured a multiple gamble: First, financializing a hitherto more diversified U.S. economy; second, using massive quantities of debt and leverage to do so; third, following up a stock market bubble with an even larger housing and mortgage credit bubble; fourth, roughly quadrupling U.S. credit-market debt between 1987 and 2007, a scale of excess that historically unwinds; and fifth, consummating these events with a mixed fireworks of dishonesty, incompetence and quantitative negligence."

U.S. ON A SLIPPERY SLOPE?

Phillips' strongest point as a political commentator always has been that he really understands the political and economic histories of the United States and Western Europe, which adds force to his musing on whether America now finds itself on the cusp of the sort of financially induced decline through which Bourbon Spain, the Dutch Republic and imperial Britain once passed.

The fact that much of *Bad Money* feels ripped from this morning's headlines adds to the book's sense of urgent relevance. It also gives stretches of Phillips' argument a rather rushed, uncharacteristically first-draft quality.

Derivative finance and the dynamics of hedge fund operation are complex matters in any case, and a bit more of the author's time might have produced more of the lucid economic explanation for which he's rightly known.

One also misses more of the real world, "insider" financial and political anecdotes more liberally sprinkled throughout many of his earlier books.

See **DECLINE** Page 17

Exploring Green, Yampa Rivers Year-Around

By Mike Nobles

DINOSAUR

Four Seasons on the Green and Yampa Rivers
By Hal Crimmel, Photographs by Steve Gaffney
The University of Arizona Press
96 pages, \$14.95.

For some time now the University of Arizona Press has been periodically publishing books in a critically acclaimed series titled Desert Places.

To date they have released 12 books for such places as the Grand Canyon, Organ Pipe Cactus, Cedar Mesa, Escalante, and the Painted Desert. Each one has successfully portrayed the beauty, diversity and special sense of place unique to the area in question.

This latest offering is no exception and, in my opinion, is one of the best.

A couple of years ago my wife and I floated the Yampa River in Dinosaur National Monument in late summer and were delighted with the calming manner of the river and the dazzling landscape through which it courses.

Later, during a river trip through Cataract Canyon with a fellow rafter who lived in the Dinosaur Monument area, I was introduced to a description of the area during the other three seasons of the year I had not previously considered.

I always assumed it was best seen during the summer months and had not really considered the possibilities available during the other three seasons.

Thus, it was with more than passing interest that I sat down to read this won-

derful description of hiking and whitewater rafting through an area best seen in all seasons.

As the name implies this book takes the reader, in narrative and photographs, through four seasons on the Green and Yampa Rivers and their so-called home base, Dinosaur National Monument located along the Wyoming-Utah border. It is quite a trip.

When you combine Hal Crimmel's lyrical narrative with Steve Gaffney's stark photographs you end up with a beautiful description and image of the incomparable Dinosaur National Monument with its world-famous fossil quarry and two legendary whitewater rivers, one of which, the Yampa, is the last free-flowing river in the U.S.

From the season of ice during the winter months when temperatures can reach 40-below and the silence can be deafening to the high water much anticipated by river rafters in the spring; from the solitude to be found during the lazy part of summer to late summer/early fall when the tourists are few and the free-flowing Yampa invites the visitor to drift through some of the West's most spectacular canyons, the reader is introduced to a magnificent spectacle of nature.

In addition, Crimmel provides the reader with an overview of the myriad issues facing these public lands such as tourism, dams, the endangered flora and fauna and a host of other issues inherent in "managed wilderness" much in favor by government agencies.

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

Wrong Way John

Sen. McCain As Commander In Chief?

Editor's Note: U.S. Sen. John McCain has repeatedly confused Sunni and Shi-ite religious sects, revealing a stunning ignorance for a senator who claims to be the sole possessor of superior knowledge and judgment regarding U.S. involvement in Iraq.

With this issue we begin reminding readers of McCain's inability to think straight, adding every day to his astonishing record of inaccurate assessments and poor predictions about the situation in Iraq.

From his declaration that U.S. troops would be "greeted as liberators" and his nonsensical assessment of the security of Baghdad to his assertions of political progress in Iraq, which even the top U.S. commander in that country contradicts, McCain has a damning history of being wrong on Iraq.

McCain on Iraq: "I Believe That It Will Not Be Nearly As Difficult As Some Allege." While appearing on NBC's Meet the Press, McCain was asked if a military operation in Iraq would be difficult. He responded, "You know, when you say it won't be difficult, whenever you send young Americans into harm's way, it's going to be difficult. And we will lose American lives. So that said, I believe that it will not be nearly as difficult as some allege." – NBC, Meet the Press, 9.22.02

HIS PREDICTION GOES AWRY

McCain Said The War In Iraq Would Be "One of The Best Things That's Happened To America." While appearing on NBC's Meet the Press, McCain said, "We're going to be all right. We're going to prevail and we will win and it'll be one of the best things that's happened to America and the world in a long time 'cause it'll reverberate throughout the Middle East." – NBC, Meet the Press, 3.30.03

McCain Predicted "Great Joy and Pleasure" In Iraq. While appearing on NBC's Meet the Press, McCain said, "I believe that these people have the same yearnings for freedom and democracy and independence and self-determination that every person on Earth does, and once this Gestapo is off of their backs, then I think you will see great joy and pleasure that we were able to free them and that will not come until they are sure that they don't have Saddam Hussein returning again." – NBC, Meet the Press, 3.30.03

HE PRAISES BUSH LEADERSHIP

McCain Said Bush Led With "Clarity" and Did Not Exaggerate the Case for War. In 2003, McCain praised President Bush's leadership on the Iraq war saying, "I think the president has led with great clarity and I think he's done a great job leading the country, don't you all?" And asked if he thought the president exaggerated the case for war, McCain said, "I don't think so." – MSNBC, Hardball, 4.23.03; Fox News, 7.31.03

McCain Said "Only An Obdurate Refusal To Face Unpleasant Facts" Could Allow One To Believe We Have Rushed To War. In a 2003 New York Times op-ed, McCain wrote, "Only an obdurate refusal to face unpleasant facts in this case, that a tyrant who survives only by the constant use of violence is not going to be



coerced into good behavior by nonviolent means, could allow one to believe that we have rushed to war." – New York Times, 3.13.03

WHERE IS THE STABILITY?

McCain Said That Disarming Iraq Would "Significantly Improve The Stability of The Region." In a 2003 New York Times op-ed, McCain wrote, "Many critics suggest that disarming Iraq through regime change would not result in an improved peace. There are risks in this endeavor, to be sure.

"But no one can plausibly argue that ridding the world of Saddam Hussein will not significantly improve the stability of the region and the security of American interests and values." – New York Times, 3.13.03

McCain Predicted "Jubilant Iraqis" Would Diminish Anti-American Sentiment In The Middle East. In the build up to the Iraq War, McCain reportedly said that it is "more likely that antipathy toward the United States in the Islamic world might diminish amid the demonstrations of jubilant Iraqis celebrating the end of a regime that has few equals in its ruthlessness." – American Conservative Magazine, 2.11.08

Repeatedly, McCain Claimed The United States Would Win "Easily" In Iraq. In 2002 and 2003, before the invasion, McCain repeatedly claimed success in Iraq would be easy and minimized potential risks. According to CNN, McCain stated, "Because I know that as successful as I believe we will be, and I believe that the success will be fairly easy, we will still lose some American young men or women."

Two days later he was quoted again by CNN: "We're not going to get into house-to-house fighting in Baghdad. We may have to take out buildings, but we're not going to have a bloodletting of trading American bodies for Iraqi bodies."

TO BE CONTINUED

He's 'McSame' on Social Security, Too

By Joe Conason

The most puzzling aspect of John McCain's political persona is his habitual attraction to George W. Bush's bad ideas.

Their shared enthusiasm for invading Iraq and then escalating the war is why "McSame" will soon become the new shorthand for the Arizona Republican, replacing "maverick" – but that isn't the only reason.

He doesn't just endorse the disastrous foreign policy initiatives; he loves the failed domestic policy schemes, too.

Specifically, McCain is a longtime supporter of President Bush's Social Security privatization initiative, last seen descending into oblivion only months after its introduction in 2005.

HE SERVED AS A WHITE HOUSE PROP

He played a cameo role in the promotion of that notion [which never became an actual plan or bill in Congress] when the White House trotted him in for one of the President's staged public "conversations" on the subject.

Back then his pleas for everyone to sit down and negotiate the surrender of Social Security to Wall Street were universally ignored, yet that scarcely seems to have discouraged him.

Actually, McCain supported Social Security privatization before it was uncool, when he first ran for president eight years ago. The Wall Street Journal reported recently that a proposal to divert a portion of payroll taxes to finance private accounts, like the Bush scheme, was "a centerpiece of a McCain presidential bid in 2000."

Both he and Bush have wanted to dismantle Social Security for many years, in fact, and he has indicated that will be an important goal for a McCain presidency.

WILL HE LISTEN TO HIS ADVISERS?

Sensibly enough, however, his advisers are trying to mute such themes in his campaign, knowing that privatization is extremely unpopular.

They may have noticed that \$50 million worth of advertising and promotion didn't work three years ago. They may also have noticed that their candidate is poorly equipped to discuss the issue.

As he once confessed, "the issue of economics is not something I've understood as well as I should."

So, on the McCain campaign website, the section concerning Social Security merely suggests he would "supplement" the existing system with personal investment accounts – a suggestion that is entirely different from the more radical kind of privatization he has supported in the past.

MCCAIN'S INCREDIBLY SHRINKING MEMORY

But when the Wall Street Journal inquired about the discrepancy between his website and his previous statements, the candidate declared that his own position has never changed.

"I'm totally in favor of personal savings accounts," he said. "As part of Social Security reform, I believe that private savings accounts are a part of it – along the lines that President Bush proposed."

[The other "parts" would include sharp benefit cuts, if the senator's past votes and statements provide any guide to future policy.]

"I'll correct any policy paper that I've put out that might intimate that personal savings accounts are not a very important factor," he vowed.

THIS IS 'STRAIGHT TALK?'

Perhaps the old "straight talker" was simply saying what he thought would please powerful readers of the Journal, a newspaper whose editorial page avidly supports privatized accounts.

But privatization is still not emphasized on the McCain website, to say the least. He doesn't utter a word about private accounts in a video on the site titled "Social Security."

Instead, he pledges in that video to seek the same kind of solution achieved by President Ronald Reagan and the late House Speaker Tip O'Neill more than two decades ago.

Following the advice of a commission headed by Alan Greenspan, who has since come and gone as Federal Reserve chairman, the president and the Democratic Congressional leadership agreed to bolster the system with new revenues and minor benefit changes.

EVEN REAGAN AND GREENSPAN KNEW BETTER

Although Reagan and Greenspan both had long disparaged Social Security, they didn't broach the topic of privatization.

See McSAME Page 13

Outright Lies Are Found In Textbook

Talk about a civics lesson: A public high-school senior has raised questions about political bias in a popular textbook on U.S. government, and legal scholars and top scientists say the teen's criticism is well-founded.

They say *American Government* by rightwingers James Wilson and John Dilulio presents a skewed view of topics from global warming to separation of church and state.

The publisher says it will review the book, as will the College Board, which oversees college-level Advanced Placement courses used in high schools.

Matthew LaClair of Kearny, NJ, recently brought his concerns to the attention of the Center for Inquiry, an Amherst, NY, think tank that promotes science and has issued a scathing report about the textbook.

"I just realized from my own knowledge that some of this stuff in the book is just plain wrong," said LaClair, who is using the book as part of an AP government class at Kearny High School.

TEXTBOOK IS WIDELY USED

The textbook is designed for a college audience, but also is widely used in AP American government courses, said Richard Blake, a spokesman for the publisher, Houghton Mifflin Co.

Blake said the company "will be working with the authors to evaluate in detail the criticisms of the Center for Inquiry." Blake said some disputed passages already have been excised from the newest edition of the book.

Dilulio, a University of Pennsylvania professor, formerly worked for the Bush Administration as director of faith-based initiatives. Wilson is the Ronald Reagan Professor of Public Policy at Pepperdine University.

LaClair said he was particularly upset about the book's treatment of global warming. James Hansen, the director of NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, recently heard about LaClair's concerns and has lent him support.

ERRONEOUS STATEMENTS CITED

Hansen has sent Houghton Mifflin a letter stating that the book's discussion on global warming contained "a large number of clearly erroneous statements" that give students "the mistaken impression that the scientific evidence of global warming is doubtful and uncertain."

The edition of the textbook published in 2005, which is in high school classrooms now, states that "science doesn't know whether we are experiencing a dangerous level of global warming or how bad the greenhouse effect is, if it exists at all."

A newer edition published late last year was changed to say, "Science doesn't know how bad the greenhouse effect is."

CONTROVERSY OVER CLIMATE CHANGE

The authors kept a phrase stating that global warming is "enmeshed in scientific uncertainty."

Few scientists downplay global warming and the role of burning fossil fuels, while the overwhelming majority of climate scientists and peer-reviewed scientific research say human activity is causing climate change.

Last year an international collection of hundreds of scientists and government officials unanimously approved wording that said the scientific community had "very high confidence," meaning more than 90% likelihood that global warming

Lower Math Scores In Catholic Schools

Children in Roman 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, a new study finds.

"I was actually surprised to find the results that Catholic schools are worse in mathematics," said Sean F. Reardon, the study's lead author and an associate professor of education and sociology at Stanford University.

"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."

He presented the study findings during the annual conference of the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, a professional society that focuses on "cause and effect" research and other kinds of rigorous studies.

CATHOLIC SCHOOL EDGE CHANGING?

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

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

One exception to that trend was a controversial national study of private schools published in 2006 by researchers Christopher Lubienski and Sarah Thule Lubienski.

It found that, once factors like family-income level, race, and gender were taken into account, Catholic school 4th and 8th graders scored lower than public school students on national math exams.

For their study, Reardon and co-authors Jacob Cheadle, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Stanford graduate student Joe Robinson analyzed data from a federal survey program that has been tracking more than 21,000 students nationally who entered kindergarten in fall 1998. [Education Week, March 12]



is caused by humans.

LaClair also was concerned about the textbook's treatment of U.S. Supreme Court decisions regarding prayer in school.

ANOTHER FALSEHOOD IS NOTED

The book shows a picture of kids praying in front of a Virginia high school and states, "The Supreme Court will not let this happen inside a public school." Blake said the photo was cut out of the most recent edition.

The textbook goes on to state that the court has ruled as "unconstitutional every effort to have any form of prayer in public schools, even if it is nonsectarian, voluntary or limited to reading a passage of the Bible."

Those examples are not correct, says Charles Haynes, a religious liberties expert at the First Amendment Center in Washington.

"Students can pray inside a public school in many different ways," Haynes said, adding they can pray alone or in groups before lunch or in religious clubs, for example.

Haynes said students can't disrupt the school or interfere with the rights of others. The court has said the prayer can't be state-sponsored, so a teacher can't lead a prayer and a school can't require it, Haynes said.

TRYING TO LEAD THE READER

LaClair added that he perceived a bias in the book, too.

"All the statements for the most part were trying to lead the reader in one direction and not giving a fair account of everything," he said.

It's not the first time LaClair has raised alarm bells over teaching at his school. A few years ago, he tape-recorded a teacher making religious remarks to his students. Many people at the school were upset with LaClair for raising the issue.

"I'm not looking to cause a huge controversy, but I want the students to be taught correct information," LaClair said.

His mother, Debra, says she thinks her son is giving his peers another kind of civics lesson.

"When he sees something that is incorrect, he wants to fix it," she said. "That's him. That's what he does."

McSAME

From Page 12

Invoking the once-magical names of Reagan and Greenspan may work well on YouTube, particularly among the more gullible segments of the voting public.

Between his remarks to the Journal and his video statement, it isn't easy to determine whether McCain means to preserve, reform or destroy Social Security, but the safest assumption is that he will pursue the same objectives President Bush was forced to abandon.

As one of the wealthiest men in the Senate - thanks to the highly profitable liquor company bequeathed to him and his wife years ago - McCain faces no economic difficulty.

He never has to worry about how he will afford retirement or the value of his assets, which is why risky schemes like privatization look so brilliant to him.

But in the coming campaign, he may find that working families have no desire to turn Social Security over to the same companies now seeking bailouts from the federal government - or to the politicians who would enact that investment bankers' daydream.

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

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NCLB's Nightmare For Public Schools

By Claudia Ayers

Next September, teachers like me will face hours of meetings considering mountains of data, derived from rounds of testing that our students and we must now endure.

In the fall, we will no longer have the students whose scores we will analyze, but what else are you going to do with the data, besides publish it in the local papers and wonder why the mathematically challenged gloat with the upticks, and feel shamed by the downturns?

The confused and erratic sophomores we now attempt to teach have had scripted education since first grade, when whole language reading programs and a "fuzzy math" were rejected and all too often replaced with worksheets that were guided by scripts that teachers simply read.

Additionally, since the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, these students have had endless practice rounds for standardized tests.

NCLB STUDENTS LESS INTERESTED

They know how to bubble in answers, but have limited ability to ask questions, and seem so much less interested in understanding their world than the students who preceded them.

All school children and youth now carry many burdens: content standards, measurable objectives, rigor, accountability, school-wide pacing, subject breadth [mile wide, inch deep], proficiencies in bunches-of-facts, homework in the primary grades, skills drills and practice tests, fewer high school electives but more math support classes, heavy backpacks and exit exams.

These are the fruits of fear. Gone are the days of true engagement and authenticity, when emerging goals included such things as integrated and systems learning, concept development and global citizenship.

IMPORTANT THINGS THAT ARE LEFT BEHIND

Other things being left behind: field trips, democracy in action, age-appropriate curriculum [everything is hurried], project choices, recess, problem solving, team building, discussion, teachable moments, student-taught lessons, inquiry, discovery, inductive thought, art, music, teachers teaching to their strengths, freedom, or even joy.

No wonder kids are dropping out in record numbers. The kinds of things that lead to wisdom and ideals are steadily being eradicated, and if the people who should know better don't start standing up, valued public education will, simply, be irrevocably lost.

Private school enrollments steadily increase. Kids were prompted to think in the "fuzzy math" days; the math skills were embedded in rich problems [not on drills and work sheets].

GONE IS RICH LITERATURE

Whole language sought to offer children the rewards of rich literature a public confusion about imaginary battles between phonics and sight-word advocates aside.

There is a difference between authentic reform efforts and the so-called reforms that NCLB has wrought [or is it rot?]

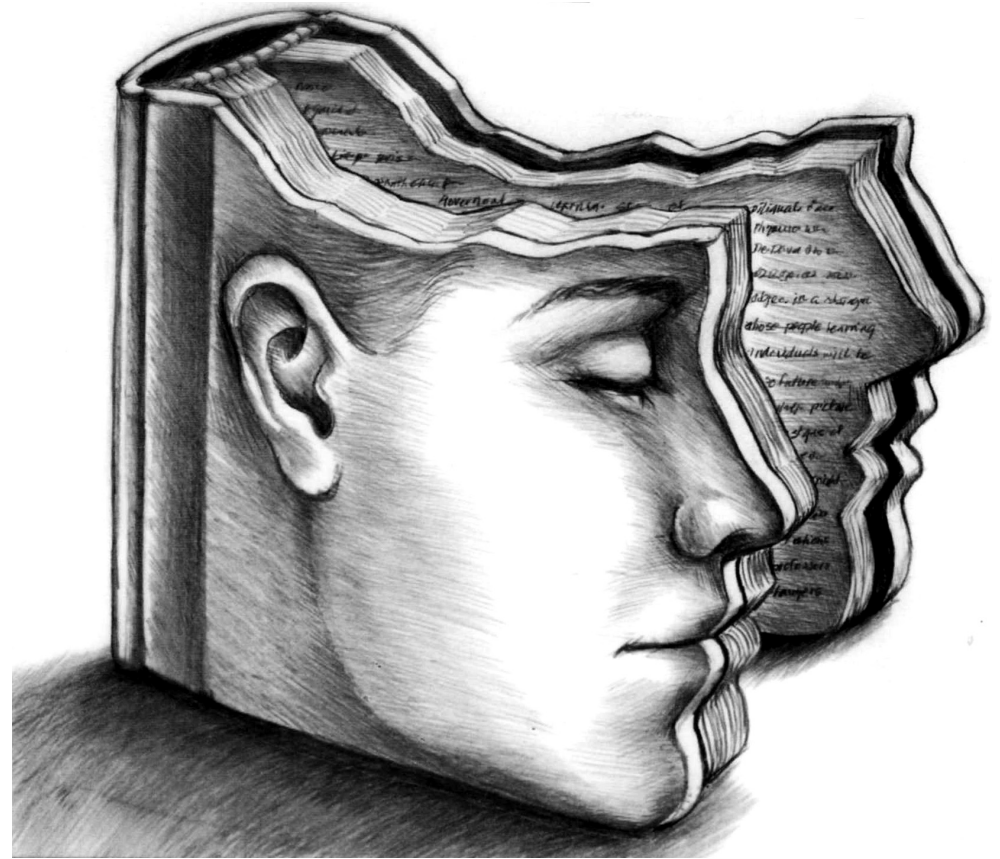
Should every high school student really be required to take three years of college preparatory high-school courses in order to graduate as required in many local schools?

Or is this just another way to force kids with lower testing abilities to drop out so those who remain will produce higher Academic Performance Indices?

When your school administrators and board members keep telling you their main goal is improving student achievement, that is the first clue they have uncritically accepted fear-based education.

THINGS THAT CAN'T BE MEASURED

The joy of learning and creativity are not measurable. Granted, true graduation rates and satisfaction surveys could give some useful data. But basing achievement almost exclusively on standardized test scores is astonishingly nearsighted.



Honestly, I have seen hundreds of standardized test questions, and educated people would be appalled by their quality.

That the testing companies regularly rack up errors in scoring is also a little known facet of the industry that is taking hundreds of millions of dollars away from U.S. classrooms.

The High School Exit Exam [HSEE] has just been given to all of California's 10th graders. Most of our students will "pass."

IDENTIFYING THOSE WHO DON'T PASS

The ones who do not pass are likely to have a different first language, have testing anxiety, or have a learning disability. Sure, they have more chances to pass, but anxiety cranks up with each "try." Each year there will still be thousands of great kids in California who will not receive a diploma and will not walk at graduation.

Sadly, these are the students who will be most devastated by the missed opportunity. Then in April, all students from second through 11th grades take another enormous battery of California Standards Tests [CSTs].

The dollars and hours thrown at this enterprise is insane, especially given that 20% of the school year remains, yet students are evaluated on how they did for year-long course standards.

My college-age daughters were not subject to the HSEE and I opted them out of the CSTs. They tell me that were they still in high school they would not take the HSEE as a form of civil disobedience, even if it meant they could not walk at graduation.

PEOPLE WITH HARDENED HEARTS

They say they wouldn't want to shake the hands of adults with hardened hearts who did nothing to prevent this test from devastating the lives of our most vulnerable students.

While I love the idea that students would seek justice by protesting the HSEE, it is the appropriate role of adults to protect children from poor policy decisions by standing up and unconditionally loving children, not only their own, but all children.

Tax dollars are precious; they should not be used to make profits for test companies. Nor can we afford the countless hours and dollars devoted to prepare for and administer these pathetic tests.

- The author is a teacher at Aptos High School in California

Unleash Legal Aid For Homeowners

By Joseph Sant

Legal aid lawyers are among the few allies of poor homeowners caught in the subprime-mortgage meltdown. But these lawyers are hamstrung by federal regulations that limit homeowners' access to speedy, low-cost legal relief.

One restriction prohibits legal aid lawyers, unlike their corporate counterparts, from collecting attorney fees on behalf of vindicated clients.

Fee awards are an incentive for both parties to negotiate quickly because legal costs increase as litigation drags on. Recalcitrant lenders can stall as long as they like, knowing it will cost them nothing.

This is especially harmful because legal aid societies have been swamped by the foreclosure crisis, and lawyers tied up in litigation are unavailable to other at-risk homeowners.

NO LOBBYING IS ALLOWED

Another counterproductive regulation prevents legal aid lawyers from lobbying lawmakers with solutions to repair our mortgage markets.

Policy deliberation is an echo chamber, dominated by financial players, excluding legal aid experts, who criticized shortsighted deregulation.

Finally, federal law forbids legal aid lawyers to undertake class action litigation,

preventing them from attacking systemic abuses in the real estate industry.

Class actions offer the best chance for taking on foreclosure fraud, identifying illegal fees, recovering stolen equity and sending powerful signals to would be predators. Instead, legal aid lawyers must prosecute cases one at a time.

PERILOUS MORTGAGES WERE NOT SOUGHT

Most homeowners facing foreclosure did not seek out perilous mortgages with irrationally high interest rates, nor were they able to bargain with lenders on an equal footing.

Subprime lenders aggressively went after the financially unsophisticated like the elderly, their fixed incomes strained by the increasing cost of living, and those in low-income and minority neighborhoods.

If the federal government had not weakened and silenced legal aid, borrowers would have been far better protected against the abuses of our unregulated subprime mortgage industry.

Now that many of these families risk losing their homes, we should get rid of misguided regulations on the lawyers who can best help them.

- The author is a third-year student at Georgetown University Law Center

Can Hope Rise Again – Audaciously?

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Hope is indeed an audacious attribute in the American society, especially in these times. Perhaps hope has always been an audacious spirit in any and all ages.

Surely there are rarely ever periods that tend to generate hope, although some may be more conducive to the emergence of that feeling than others. This has not been a time that stimulates hope. Neither has this been an era that nourishes hope that is spontaneously generated amongst us.

That the spirit of hope should arise, find form, and spring free from a religious hearth of hostility is most certainly an anomaly.

The nation has been exposed over and over to the anger in those video sermons from Chicago.

MOST OF AMERICA TURNED OFF

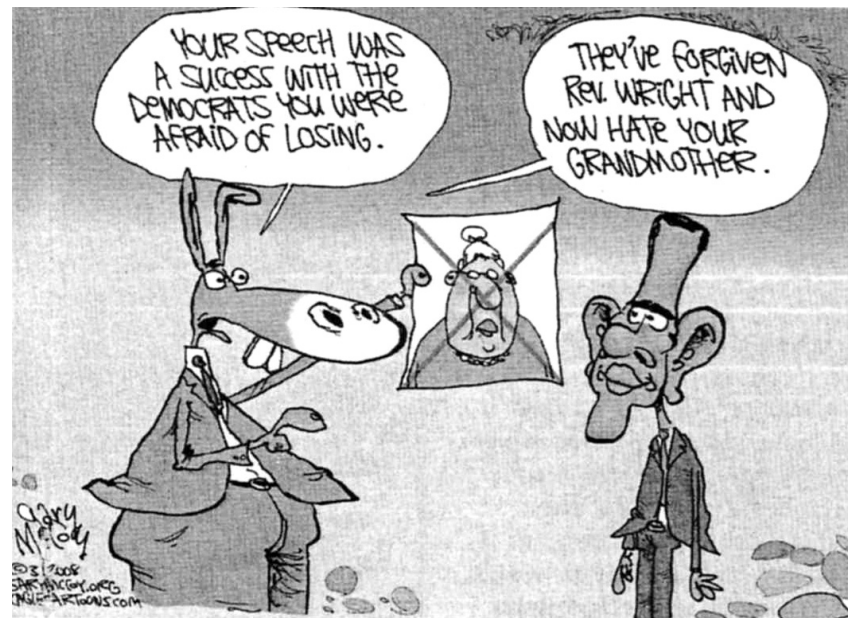
Those simply do not play well among most citizens, not even among those who have made an effort to understand and to empathize with the harsh history of the Black experience in this land. Perhaps they are particularly disappointing to some of the latter.

At this crucial juncture in the political history of America, the audacity of hate has trumped the audacity of hope.

At least momentarily, this is so. Will that be a transient triumph?

In seeking to express the pent up anger of his race, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright presents an incongruous picture. A Marine veteran himself, he screams venom at the country for which he cared enough to serve. His personal actions and history do not portray a subversive.

One finds much hyperbole in these speeches, unfortunately a pattern of exaggeration in rhetoric that characterizes too many writings and verbalizations in the political arena. It appears that a certain flair for drama and oratory is also



demonstratively present.

WRIGHT SPOKE FROM HEART

It is said that the Reverend spoke from the heart of an historically oppressed people. He is credited with speaking from the angst of generations of victims. However, this is no longer viewed as the reality of today by most.

Instead the Reverend's angry shouts are viewed as just that. Their content is offensive. These are seen as perpetuating hostilities and differences, rather than as being useful toward social change.

Unfortunately, these utterances will no doubt be employed to generate similar emotions on the opposite pole during the political season ahead.

Hate speech is hate speech, no matter who is delivering it, in what environment, or from what motives or history. If we are intolerant of hate speech from any social sector, then we must be intolerant of hate speech from all social sectors.

Out of the ashes of such fires, will the phoenix of hope rise again – audaciously?

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

SWINDLE

From Page 9

missioner but a Major League baseball cabal of billionaire owners ponied up the dough to keep George W. Bush in the White House.

The Associated Press reported that Bush – a former co-owner of the Texas Rangers baseball team – had his palm greased by over half of the 30 major league teams.

Seven owners even held the distinction of being “Bush Rangers” – meaning they raised at least \$200,000 each, and six were “Bush Pioneers,” signifying \$100,000 a piece.

Owners loved Bush for a more complex reason than the usual ardor that billionaires have for their tax-cutter-in-chief.

They all want to get taxpayers to pay the tab for new state-of-the-art stadiums – and no one ever fronted a stadium swindle better than George W. Bush.

THE STANDARD FOR LARGE SCALE EXTORTION

Bush set the standard for large-scale extortion when his ownership group got the local and state governments to pay for the ballpark in Arlington.

After an adult life of professional incompetence, Dubya had finally gotten his dream job as a managing partner of the Rangers.

For an initial investment of \$600,000 – borrowed, of course – the then-president's son endured the toil of attending home baseball games and smiling a lot for the cameras.

As Bush smirked his way through his 40s, the owners behind him [think a dozen Dick Cheneys in ten-gallon hats] threatened to move the team if the city of Arlington didn't pay for a new park.

The local government caved. In the fall of 1990, it guaranteed that the city would pay \$135 million out of an estimated cost of \$190 million. The remainder was raised through a ticket surcharge.

FANS AND TAXPAYERS FOOTED ENTIRE BILL

In other words, local taxpayers and baseball fans footed the whole bill.

This plan was sold to Arlington voters with Bush's glad-handing help. At the end of the day, the owners of the Rangers, including Bush, got a stadium worth nearly \$200 million without putting down a penny of their own money.

But the scam didn't end there. As part of the deal, the Rangers ownership was granted a chunk of land in addition to the stadium – land that, of course, increased in value as a result of the stadium's construction.

To make this happen, Democratic Gov. Ann Richards signed into law an extraordinary measure setting up the Arlington Sports Facilities Development Authority [ASFDA], which had the power to seize privately owned land deemed necessary for stadium construction.

“Never before had a municipal authority in Texas been given license to seize the property of a private citizen for the benefit of other private citizens,” wrote journalist Joe Conason.

HE RAN FOR GOVERNOR ON WHAT PLATFORM?

“On Nov. 8, 1993, with the stadium being readied to open the following spring, Bush announced that he would be running for governor. He didn't blush when he proclaimed that his campaign theme would demand ‘self-reliance and personal responsibility rather than dependence on government.’”

Bush held onto his stake of the team as governor, and by the time he cashed out in 1998 for \$15 million, Bush's return on his original \$600,000 “investment”

was 2,400%.

So the next time someone complains about the “greed” of pro athletes, tell them that if they want to get bent out of shape about someone's undeserved wealth, they should take a detour to the upper deck and boo outside the owners box.

Polls show that up to 80% of people oppose public subsidies for stadiums. Stadium funding referendums have been defeated in both “red” and “blue” states, from California to Minnesota to Virginia.

Fighting stadium giveaways can raise big questions for people about the priorities of a system that will spit-shine sports arenas while schools and hospitals crumble.

All people who believe in human need over corporate greed should join the fight.

AGRITOURISM

From Page 8

and improve the well being of local people.

55 MILLION GEOTOURISTS

Fifty-five million Americans are now classified as “geotourists” as well as nearly 100 million traveling Americans moving in that direction.

Last year, almost one-third of Americans went hiking, according to the American Hiking Society.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation Reports is conducted every five years. The last survey in 2001 included the following information:

More than 82 million U.S. residents [ages 16 years and older] fished, hunted or wildlife-watched in 2001. During that year, 34.1 million people fished, 13 million hunted and 66.1 million participated in at least one type of wildlife-watching activity [observing, feeding or photographing wildlife.]

BILLIONS SPENT ON RECREATION

Wildlife recreationists' avidity was reflected in their spending that totaled \$108 billion in 2001. This amounted to 1.1% of the gross domestic product. Of the total amount spent, \$28 billion was for trips, \$64 billion for equipment and \$16 billion for other items.

Sportspersons spent a total of \$70 billion in 2001: \$36 billion on fishing, \$21 billion on hunting and \$14 billion on items used for both hunting and fishing [the sum of expenditures totals \$71 billion due to rounding].

Wildlife watchers spent \$38 billion on trips, equipment and other items.

Deer hunting is unquestionably the most popular form of hunting in the United States. According to the survey, 10.3 million hunted deer in 2001, which is more than four times greater than the second most hunted species – turkey.

For individuals more than 16 years of age, nearly one in every 20 Americans and eight in 10 hunters hunted deer in 2001. Their hunting-related expenditures while seeking deer totaled nearly \$10.7 billion.

Wildlife watching is the largest economic growth sector in outdoor recreation.

Consumers Bottled Up By Airlines, Water

By Jim Hightower

In a triumph of marketing over reasoning, the bottled water industry has turned us into conspicuously silly consumers.

Controlled by a handful of global conglomerates [such as Coca-Cola and Nestle], the water industry has created the fantasy that if it's in a bottle, it's purer than what comes out of the tap.

But wait – the Environmental Protection Agency stringently regulates the public water systems, requiring tests several times a day for bacteria and other contaminants, and these test results are public information.

The corporate bottlers, on the other hand, are overseen by the more lackadaisical Food and Drug Administration, which requires them to test their water sources only once a week – and the results are kept secret by the corporations.

DON'T MESS WITH PERRIER

One group that is beginning to rebel is one you might not expect: upscale restaurants.

Such places profit handsomely from offering Perrier, San Pellegrino, Fiji or other designer waters, paying a dollar or two for each bottle and selling them for eight or 10 bucks. Yet, Chez Panisse in Berkeley, CA, and Del Posto in New York City are among the pioneers who are foregoing this profit center, substituting free filtered tap water or house-made sparkling water that's also drawn from the tap.

Why would they do this? Because they are part of a growing sustainable food movement that prides itself in using local, seasonal ingredients for their menu items.

Think about it: In terms of energy, environment and sustainability, it makes no sense to load cargo ships with millions of bottles of water, haul them thousands of miles to our shores, truck them hundreds of miles to our restaurants, then chuck the bottles into our overloaded landfills – when the local public water system supplies perfectly good water available at the turn of a faucet.

Just as it makes economic and environmental sense to “eat local,” it also makes sense to “drink local.”

THE NOT-SO-FRIENDLY SKIES

Travel in some primitive parts of the world is a nightmare – passengers are treated like livestock, service is surly, rules are ridiculous, delays are common and the whole experience is dreadful.

Luckily, here in sophisticated America, we have modern airlines – on which passengers are treated like livestock, service is surly, rules are ridiculous, delays are common and the whole experience is dreadful.

Airline executives publicly blame everything from the impact of 9/11 to bad



weather, but when these executives talk to shareholders and the business media, they gleefully confess that they have deliberately created such unpleasantness as a crude way to jack up their stock prices and profits.

For example, while the public demand for air travel has steadily increased, airline honchos have intentionally decreased the number of flights.

That's the opposite of how a free market economy is supposed to work – if consumer demand is up, companies theoretically respond by increasing supply.

BLAME IT ON AIR TRAVEL MONOPOLIES

But air travel is a monopolistic market, with one or two airlines controlling nearly all airports. So, by cutting the number of available seats, not only can the monopolists create an artificial shortage that raises ticket prices, but they also create overbooked flights that have all the charm of cattle cars.

Meanwhile, they've also made drastic cuts in staff, leading to more breakdowns and flight delays ... as well as to less service for customers. The staff that remains has had its wages and benefits slashed, which doesn't help morale. And to make employees even more surly, CEOs have started paying themselves millions of dollars in bonuses.

Based on these manipulations, one airline president enthusiastically told shareholders, “We see an encouraging revenue environment.”

Sure, boss – and we passengers see a discouraging decline into primitive levels of travel.

Thanks for nothing.

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W's Big Tex Image Fails Smell Test

By Jim Hightower

George W. likes to pose as the Texas president – in the rough-hewn, rancher model of Lyndon Johnson.

However, George isn't actually a Texan – he was born in Connecticut, went to an East Coast prep school and to Ivy League colleges, and he summered in Kennebunkport at his family's oceanfront estate. Nor is he a rancher, as Lyndon was.

Yes, George bought a ranchette to boost his cowboy image when he decided to run for president, but this “cowboy” has no cattle and is even afraid of horses – that's not quite a “tall-in-the-saddle” president like Johnson.

Yet, there is one area where George W. has stood taller than the real Texas president: Federal spending. LBJ was derided as a big-spending liberal, but he was tight-fisted compared to Bush.

W'S SPENDING FAR SURPASSES LBJ'S

While George is now trying to pretend that he's a small-government fiscal conservative, federal spending in his administration has grown by 5.3% a year, nearly a full point higher than the rate of increase in the Johnson years, and more than double the annual spending growth under Democrats Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.

Of course, the Bush White House takes no responsibility for anything negative, so it's now trying to blame the billions of dollars that it's dumping into his “war on terrorism” for distorting Bush's spending numbers [maybe the Bushites don't remember that LBJ had a war to finance, too, since so few of them actually served in it].

But Bush spending is not just about his mismanaged wars. He has also hiked budgets in most agencies, with a disproportionate share of the increases going to privatization of government, corporate welfare and right-wing ideological boondoggles.

So, now that we hear free-spending George W. is suddenly posing as Mr. Frugal and demanding that Congress hold the line on spending, remember that no president has spent more of your tax dollars and gotten so little for it as he has.

PASSING SMELL TEST

If you live near any kind of factory, chemical plant or similar facility, you might have noticed curious smells emanating from those places. What is that stuff?

Well, thanks to a guy named Tony Mazzocchi, you and I have a legal right to

know in detail what kind and how much toxic stuff these places are releasing into our air, water and soil.

The national Right-to-Know program, passed in 1984, provides precise data on these toxics that is invaluable to firefighters, health specialists, environmental monitors, community advocacy groups and others.

It was not Congress – and certainly not the polluting corporations – that provided the impetus for such an essential public tool. Rather, the sparkplug was Mazzocchi. A wiry, savvy, spirited labor leader [one of the best ever], Tony even coined the phrase, “right-to-know.”

W WORKS TO RESTRICT RIGHT TO KNOW

Around 1970, he began receiving hundreds of complaints from chemical workers about plants that were shrouded in what the corporate bosses dismissively called “dust.”

Mazzocchi barnstormed across America – publicizing, organizing, negotiating and lobbying around the issue of the public's right to know about the toxics being so recklessly handled by these profiteers.

He helped form grass-roots coalitions that passed dozens of state and local right-to-know laws, and they finally pushed through the federal law that has forced clean-ups and saved thousands of lives.

In 2001, however, George W. happened – and he's been doing his darnedest to undo Tony's work. At the behest of corporate executives who hate the pesky public, his regulators have exempted some 3,500 toxic spewers from the Right-to-Know law.

This is one of the first bits of regulatory monkey-wrenching that Congress or a new president must reverse. If they need inspiration to do the right thing on Right-to-Know, they should read the book on Mazzocchi's extraordinary life. It's titled, *The Man Who Loved Labor and Hated Work*.

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Mom Is A Winner

The Sunday School teacher asked, “Now, Johnny, tell me frankly – do you say prayers before eating?”

“No, sir,” little Johnny replied. “I don't have to. My Mom is a good cook.”

W's Remarkable Resume

Hey, Buddy, Can You Spare A Job?

This individual seeks an executive position. He will be available next January, and is willing to relocate.

RESUME

GEORGE W. BUSH
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20520

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Law Enforcement:

I was arrested in Kennebunkport, Maine, in 1976 for driving under the influence of alcohol. I pleaded guilty, paid a fine, and had my driver's license suspended for 30 days. My Texas driving record has been "lost" and is not available.

Military:

I joined the Texas Air National Guard and went AWOL. I refused to take a drug test or answer any questions about my drug use. By joining the Texas Air National Guard, I was able to avoid combat duty in Vietnam.

College:

I graduated from Yale University with a low C average. I was a cheerleader.

PAST WORK EXPERIENCE

I ran for U.S. Congress and lost. I began my career in the oil business in Midland, TX, in 1975. I bought an oil company, but couldn't find any oil in Texas. The company went bankrupt shortly after I sold all my stock. I bought the Texas Rangers baseball team in a sweetheart deal that took land using taxpayer money. With the help of my father and our friends in the oil industry [including Enron CEO Kenneth Lay], I was elected governor of Texas.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS GOVERNOR OF TEXAS

- I changed Texas pollution laws to favor power and oil companies, making Texas the most polluted state in the Union. During my tenure, Houston replaced Los Angeles as the most smog-ridden city in America.
- I cut taxes and bankrupted the Texas treasury to the tune of billions in borrowed money.
- I set the record for the most executions by any governor in American history.
- With the help of my brother, the governor of Florida, and my father's appointments to the Supreme Court, I became President after losing by over 500,000 votes.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS PRESIDENT

- I am the first President in U.S. history to enter office with a criminal record.
- I invaded and occupied two countries at a continuing cost of over \$1 billion dollars per week.
- I spent the U.S. surplus and effectively bankrupted the U.S. Treasury.
- I shattered the record for the largest annual deficit in U.S. history.
- I set an economic record for most private bankruptcies filed in any 12-month period.
- I set the all-time record for most foreclosures in a 12-month period.
- I set the all-time record for the biggest drop in the history of the U.S. stock market. In my first year in office, over 2 million Americans lost their jobs and

DECLINE

From Page 11

Still, *Bad Money* isn't entirely lacking in those.

PUTIN'S 'KOMMISSAR KAPITALISM'

Who knew, for example, that former KGB agent Vladimir Putin earned the Russian equivalent of a doctorate from a prestigious St. Petersburg mining institute and that the dissertation he defended there dealt with the exploitation of natural resources as an engine of national development?

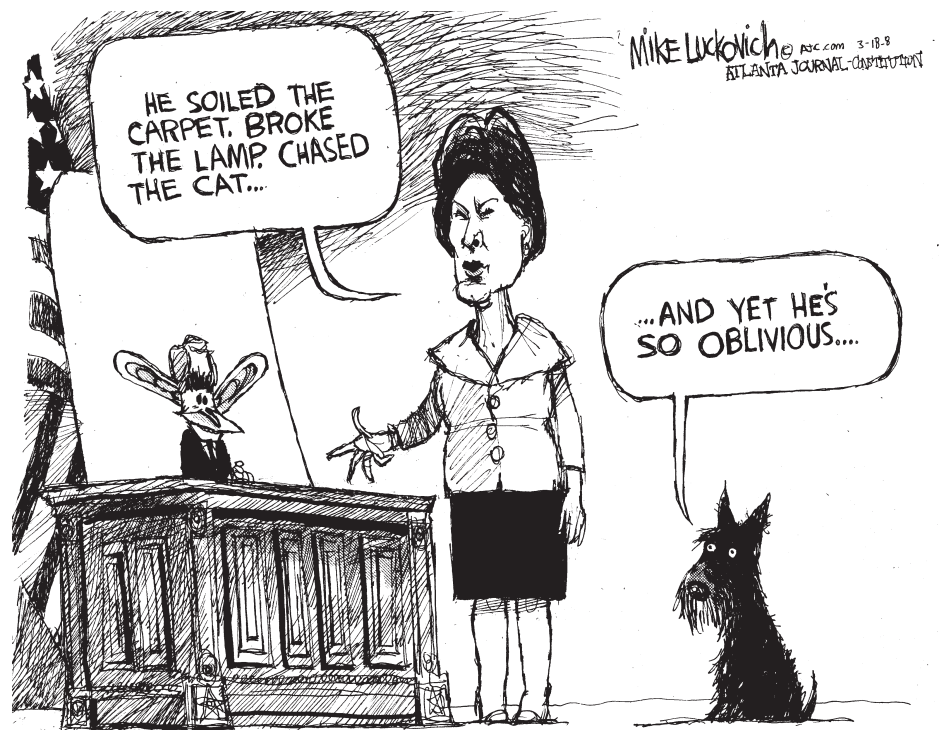
As Phillips glancingly but provocatively suggests, knowing that tells us something instructive about Putin's transformation of Russia into a global oil titan, as well as about his aspirations for further development of a polar oil field with resources that may exceed Saudi Arabia's.

[Phillips hasn't lost his talent for phrase making, and "kommissar kapitalism" seems a particularly apt description of Putin's Russia.]

Because he knows the territory in a deep and reflective way, Phillips has a keen eye for the relevant historical quotation.

America's recent economic folly, for example, is neatly summarized in a remark that the British colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, made in 1904 to a smug group of his country's financiers: "Granted that you are the clearinghouse of the world, [but] are you entirely beyond anxiety as to the permanence of your great position? . . . Banking is not the creator of our prosperity but is the creation of it. It is not the cause of our wealth, but it is the consequence of our wealth."

© Los Angeles Times



that trend continues every month.

- I'm proud that the members of my cabinet are the richest of any administration in U.S. history. My "poorest millionaire," Condoleezza Rice, has a Chevron oil tanker named after her.
- I set the record for most campaign fund-raising trips by a U.S. President.
- I am the all-time U.S. and world record-holder for receiving the most corporate campaign donations.
- My largest lifetime campaign contributor, and one of my best friends, Kenneth Lay, presided over the largest corporate bankruptcy fraud in U.S. history, Enron.
- My political party used Enron private jets and corporate attorneys to assure my success with the U.S. Supreme Court during my election decision.
- I have protected my friends at Enron and Halliburton against investigation or prosecution. More time and money was spent investigating the Monica Lewinsky affair than has been spent investigating one of the biggest corporate rip-offs in history.
- I presided over the biggest energy crisis in U.S. history and refused to intervene when corruption involving the oil industry was revealed.
- I presided over the highest gasoline prices in U.S. history.
- I changed the U.S. policy to allow convicted criminals to be awarded government contracts.
- I appointed more convicted criminals to administration than any President in U.S. history.
- I created the Ministry of Homeland Security, the largest bureaucracy in the history of the United States government.
- I've broken more international treaties than any President in U.S. history.
- I am the first President in U.S. history to have the United Nations remove the U.S. from the Human Rights Commission.
- I withdrew the U.S. from the World Court of Law.
- I refused to allow inspectors access to U.S. "prisoners of war" detainees and thereby have refused to abide by the Geneva Conventions.
- I am the first President in history to refuse United Nations election inspectors [during the 2002 U.S. election].
- I set the record for fewest numbers of press conferences of any President since the advent of television.
- I set the all-time record for most days on vacation in any one-year period.
- After taking off the entire month of August, I presided over the worst security failure in U.S. history.
- I garnered the most sympathy ever for the U.S. after the World Trade Center attacks and less than a year later made the U.S. the most hated country in the world, the largest failure of diplomacy in world history.
- I have set the all-time record for most people worldwide to simultaneously protest me in public venues [15 million people], shattering the record for protests against any person in the history of mankind.
- I am the first President in U.S. history to order an unprovoked, preemptive attack and the military occupation of a sovereign nation. I did so against the will of the United Nations, the majority of U.S. citizens, and the world community.
- I have cut health care benefits for war veterans and support a cut in duty benefits for active duty troops and their families in wartime.
- In my State of the Union Address, I lied about our reasons for attacking Iraq and then blamed the lies on our British friends.
- I am the first President in history to have a majority of Europeans [71%] view my presidency as the biggest threat to world peace and security.
- I am supporting development of a nuclear "Tactical Bunker Buster," a WMD.
- I have so far failed to fulfill my pledge to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice.

RECORDS AND REFERENCES

- All records of my tenure as governor of Texas are now in my father's library, sealed and unavailable for public view.
- All records of SEC investigations into my insider trading and my bankrupt companies are sealed in secrecy and unavailable for public view.
- All records or minutes from meetings that I, or my Vice-President, attended regarding public energy policy are sealed in secrecy and unavailable for public review.

Big Pharma's Gold Marketing Is Core Of Drug Industry

By Shannon Brownlee

Once upon a time there was an industry called pharma that was interested in doing well and doing good. Run by doctors and chemists, drug companies employed battalions of researchers whose scientific efforts resulted by mid-century in a flood of lifesaving drugs, including antibiotics, vaccines, tranquilizers, anti-histamines and steroids.

As George Merck, president of the company founded by his father, put it in 1950, "We try never to forget that medicine is for the people. It is not for the profits. The profits follow ..."

And how! Today drug companies are hugely profitable enterprises and the darlings of both Wall Street and K Street, having spent more on lobbying than any other industry between 1998 and 2004.

Their transformation from small chemical manufacturers to marketing machines with sidelines in drug development is owed in large measure to blockbuster drugs.

THEY ARE HOUSEHOLD WORDS

This is the term for any medication that generates more than \$1 billion in sales annually. Such drugs as Nexium, Celebrex, Claritin and, of course, Viagra, whose brand names are household words, became blockbusters not because they save lives, or even because they are necessarily more effective than other remedies, but because their manufacturers employ some of the cleverest marketing on the planet.

Take the selling of Zantac, an anti-ulcer drug that came on the market in 1983 and paved the way for the blockbuster drugs that followed.

First, Glaxo priced its new drug above its competitor, Tagamet – a bold move. Melody Petersen writes in *Our Daily Meds* that "like an underweight boxer trying to fool the prizefighter with his swagger [Glaxo] implied that Zantac was better."

IT WAS NO MORE EFFECTIVE THAN TAGAMET

In reality, Zantac was a "me-too" drug, chemically almost identical to Tagamet and no more effective.

But it was the second half of Glaxo's strategy that was truly dazzling.

Rather than plowing the revenue from Zantac back into R&D, as was then customary in the drug business, the company decided to invest in marketing the daylights out of its drug. Glaxo funded studies intended to show Zantac's superiority.

It hired a battalion of sales reps, who flogged the drug relentlessly to doctors. Most brilliant of all, the company pioneered a ploy now used routinely in pharmaceutical marketing: It "condition branded" Zantac.

LINKING TO A MINOR CONDITION

Glaxo's novel idea was to link its drug to the relief of a common but minor condition, then make consumers and doctors worry that the condition was a sign of a more worrisome disease.

In this case, the minor condition was old-fashioned heartburn. Glaxo warned that heartburn was a sign of chronic reflux, which the company dubbed Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease, or GERD.

Boomer's Painful Lesson Of Grace, Acceptance

By Susan Estrich

It started with my hands. They hurt. They were numb and tingling, and the pain went up and down my arms.

I did not like it.

I am a worrier, not a whiner. I'll put up with almost any level of pain and discomfort, so long as it's not accompanied by fear of something worse. Tell me it's not terminal, and I'm ready to go back to work.

I proudly think of myself as a horse – I worked through walking pneumonia, gave a speech right out of the operating room after hernia surgery and billed most of the hours I spent in labor to a client who, believe me, got almost my full attention.

THROBBING HANDS REAL PROBLEM

Not being able to use my hands is a problem. I'm not a pianist, but I am a typist. So, with my hands throbbing, I did what we do these days: I typed "sore, swollen, numb hands" into my web browser and promptly got inundated.

Carpal tunnel sounded right: 30 years on a computer, three jobs, four columns a week, briefs and motions. Could be me.

The good thing about carpal tunnel is you don't die of it. You deal with it; you have surgery if necessary. I went to the hand surgeon and then to the doctor who puts needles in your fingers and checks the electromagnetic current.

They agreed on the diagnosis: Carpal tunnel in both hands. Surgery recommended. No problem.

THE PAIN SUDDENLY SHIFTED SOUTH

But then my feet started hurting. I called my friend and internist and asked him whether it was possible that I could also have carpal tunnel in my feet. I was kidding, but actually there is such a thing. The only problem was, or is, that I don't have it.

So I had the surgery on one hand, but the other hand and my feet, and also



Soon, millions of Americans were saying goodbye plop plop, fizz fizz, hello Zantac, an expensive prescription drug they started taking every day to ward off GERD, even though most episodes of reflux go away without treatment.

FIND THEMSELVES IN A STICKY SPOT

It's hard to imagine what the endgame will be for the era of the blockbuster drug. Having built up Wall Street's thirst for the profits that blockbusters bring, drug makers are now in a sticky spot.

Without investing more in R&D, companies don't have much hope of finding new blockbusters. But no company can abandon its marketing strategy and put its money back into research without jeopardizing the sales of its current drugs.

Some drug company analysts foresee a day when the federal government will fund the clinical research that's necessary to get drugs approved, and companies will be reduced to manufacturing and selling them.

That might or might not be a good idea, but until pharma kicks its marketing habit, here are some ways to avoid harm.

Before we head to the pharmacy, we should ask our doctors if there is valid evidence that patients benefit from taking a particular medication.

We should always inquire about side effects. Better yet, we ought to be looking for ways to improve our health without a prescription.

– The author is a senior fellow at the New America Foundation and author of *Overtreated: Why Too Much Medicine Is Making Us Sicker and Poorer*

my elbow if I'm being honest, hurt just about as much as my supposedly fixed hand.

"Was it really carpal tunnel?" I asked my hand surgeon, a talented and lovely man.

"Absolutely," he said.

"So why does everything else still hurt?"

He looked at my toes and suggested I see a rheumatologist – another doctor, another set of forms, another history and more insurance cards to be photocopied on both sides.

MEMORIES OF MOTHER

I'm not complaining. I have insurance. I have access to health care. I may work three jobs, but at least I can take time to run to my different doctors.

The rheumatologist didn't like what he saw. More X-rays. More blood work. More tests. He talked to my hand doctor, my heart doctor and the various other doctors on the growing list of a healthy boomer getting older.

I remember how my mother, in her last years, spent most of her days going to doctors, how which doctor and what for was the topic of every conversation. I remember thinking, not meanly I hope, that this was not a life I looked forward to.

All of a sudden, I noticed my own calendar crammed with visits to the various medical offices around town.

CHECK OUT MY PERSONAL PHARMACY

A "robust rheumatoid" – that's what my newest doctor says I am. The good news is that I tolerate pain well. The bad news, really the danger, is that I tolerate too much and the disease could progress without our aggressively addressing it because I just put up with it.

So now I'm on more pills: four of these every Saturday, one of these the oth-

See BOOMER Page 19

CareerTech Saving Youthful Offenders

Other than alternative education, the last best hope of troubled youth is the Skills Centers School System created by Oklahoma's superb CareerTech system.

SCSS students are youthful offenders in the Corrections Department. They learn to prepare resumes, complete mock interviews, and develop an employment portfolio.

Students also work to earn an ACT Career Readiness Certificate that is nationally recognized by business/industry as documentation that the potential employee has work readiness skills needed to be successful.

LEARNING TO DEVELOP THEIR POTENTIAL

Students completing this integrated approach of career/technical education and life/employability skills development have the potential of increasing earning capacity and maintaining steady employment.

In 2007, the Oklahoma Criminal Justice Resource Center reported that there were more than 3,800 offenders between 18 and 25 in custody and 2,394 [63%] hadn't graduated from high school or earned a GED.

Those offenders who are transferred to a medium- or minimum-security facility are encouraged [and sometimes forced] to participate in education classes to prepare for GED testing.

SCHOOL DROPOUTS ARE TURNED AWAY

Since 1995, CareerTech has administered a grant program for serving high school dropouts. Unfortunately, the Republican-controlled Legislature has turned away more than 700 dropouts because the CareerTech budget has been mercilessly attacked.

Older students are offered an opportunity to attain a GED. Each year, approximately 900 older students enroll in these critical programs.

In fiscal year 2007, almost 350 participants completed requirements to receive

a high school credential.

Breaking the recidivism cycle is key to Oklahoma's economic health. Lack of education limits employment possibilities for most young offenders. The Skills Centers recognize that programs focused on the needs of young offenders are essential in reducing prison populations in the future.

FEDERAL GRANT WILL RUN OUT

The Skills Centers Division is in the third and final year of grant funding from the U.S. Department of Labor to train young offenders between 18 and 21 for success in a high-growth, high-demand occupation.

Recidivism is high for offenders younger than 25. The return on investment for training, educating and transitioning young offenders is extremely high.

The cost of incarcerating a minimum-security offender in an Oklahoma prison is approximately \$17,000 per year. The cost of arresting and convicting the young offender increases local and state costs and puts an additional strain on budgets.

PREPARING FOR PRODUCTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The amount of earnings lost by this unemployed individual is easily \$20,000 per year. By preparing young offenders to be productive citizens, family members, and taxpayers, Oklahoma can reduce the prison population and provide employers with skilled workers needed to keep the economy strong.

Three of the young offender pilot sites were located at Technology Centers and served those who had been convicted of felonies, but were not incarcerated.

These probationers participated in occupational training, academic education, and paid work-based learning activities. In the three years of operation, over 200 young offenders have participated in these pilot-training projects and almost 90% were placed in jobs after graduation.

- Frosty Troy

SUCCESS

From Page One

tion, distribution and logistics to meet Oklahoma's growing warehouse and distribution center needs.

The construction industry also continues to seek qualified skilled employees in the area of electrical trades. Females are readily accepted as electricians and have a significant earning capacity.

These two programs currently exist at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center for women.

SCSS is also developing a manufacturing class that will soon be added. Manufacturers are sending many jobs out of state and abroad because they cannot find skilled employees.

Female offenders will be trained to fill a very diverse set of industry needs. Traditional secretarial programs have been replaced with Business & Information Education training.

Female offenders train for occupations requiring a knowledge base of software applications, management of business operations, customer sales/service, and communications.

Many offenders have been incarcerated for an extended period of time and the

world of technology has advanced to include on-line social service applications, employment applications and securing information utilizing the Internet.

Basic computer skills are vital to function in society and the workplace today. SCSS offers female offenders discharging from correctional institutions the opportunity to complete a Fundamentals of Computers course.

Upon completion of the course, offenders can utilize on-line systems to complete applications, seek social services and employment. In many cases, fundamental computer knowledge can provide employment opportunities for entry-level positions.

Offenders returning to the local community must have the skills and knowledge to function as productive citizens and contribute to the economic base of the local community.

CareerTech is Oklahoma's crown jewel, ranked the best in America. Yet Republicans who control the Legislature have underfunded the agency - 6,000 students were turned away last year, including 700 school dropouts.

Next time you hear a legislator or anyone badmouth the CareerTech system, hand them this article or have someone who can read slowly enough read it to them.

BOOMER

From Page 18

er six days, two of these every day and another one of these if the pain is too much.

No, thanks. I'll take the four and the one and the two, but I'm drawing the line at the other one. Too many side effects. Pain is better.

So my hands and feet hurt, and my elbow, too, but compared to so many friends of mine fighting really tough stuff, what's a few sore limbs? Not much, except that it hurts, physically and mentally.

ONLY CHOICE: GRIN AND BEAR IT

Getting old beats the alternative, but not by a lot.

Michael Kinsley, who recently underwent a nine-hour operation for his Parkinson's, wrote movingly about feeling like a sort of "scout" for the baby boom generation, as we face the not so pleasant realities of aging.

Ultimately, what is required, I've decided, is grace and acceptance, not necessarily the strong suits of a generation that has lived with the fire of change and possibilities. But given the alternatives, what choice do we have?

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