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THE OKLAHOMA Observer



VOL. 41, NO. 8

An Independent Journal of Commentary

APRIL 25, 2009

Big Money's Political Influence De-Railing Oklahoma

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

I started this research to determine why Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett so adamantly opposes saving Union Station's rail yard from destruction. The most strategic rail lines in Oklahoma meet and link at this spacious rail yard in Oklahoma City, thus enabling a unified, harmonious flow of rail traffic statewide.

Shawnee, Norman, Chickasha, El Reno and Lawton have passed resolutions in support of saving the rail yard. These city councils object to running the relocated I-40 Crosstown expressway straight through this rail yard when sensible alternative routes for the Crosstown exist.

In contrast, Cornett favors destroying this strategically located, virtually irreplaceable, and enormously valuable asset and has publicly blocked the OKC Council from taking a second look at this issue - an issue which profoundly affects the future of rail transportation in Oklahoma, both freight and passenger.

During my research, I found some politically intriguing stories which need to be told. Each story centers around a campaign contribution to Cornett. Documentation for campaign contributions listed below came from the Oklahoma City clerk's office and the Federal Election Commission.

EMINENT DOMAIN

In 1995, Oklahoma City took an elderly widow's property [5,944 square feet] through eminent domain and paid her only \$33,395 for a house on enormously valuable land located on the southwest corner of North Classen Boulevard and Grand Boulevard. She tried to fight back, but OKC sued, and, of course, won [book 6769, page 0024].

Enter Chesapeake Energy with \$20,100 cash in hand for Cornett's



campaigns from 2004 through 2006 [\$8,000 from Chesapeake Energy, \$11,100 from owner Aubrey McClen-don, and \$1,000 from the company's land manager].

Chesapeake wanted the widow's property because the company owned adjoining land and aspired to have the entire area [about 9.5 acres] rezoned as commercial, from single-family residential, limited office, and agricultural. Commercially zoned property is generally far more valuable than areas zoned residential, office, or agricultural.

Chesapeake got both the widow's property and the rezoning! On July 1, 2008, Cornett deeded the widow's property [minus a tiny sliver the city reserved for right of way] to Chesapeake for \$241,850. On Nov. 4, 2008, the City Council finished declaring the area commercial [SPUD 481].

Huge commercial buildings are now going up over the entire 9.5 acres for restaurants and retail shops, according to workers who are building those

See RAILYARD Page 19

Outsourcing Prisons A GOP Obsession

By Arnold Hamilton

Why are Oklahoma's legislative leaders hell-bent on outsourcing corrections? Two years ago, they spent \$844,000 of the taxpayers' money for an independent audit that was part of a thinly disguised Republican strategy to promote private prisons and disparage the state correctional system.

Instead, the report praised the financially strapped agency for its efficiency and urged lawmakers to significantly increase its budget. Further, auditors offered mixed reviews on expanding state reliance on corporate-run prisons.

Today, the GOP majority all but ignores the audit's findings - entranced philosophically by the notion of privatizing corrections and politically by the power to reward special interests that helped them in their legislative takeover.

According to experts, the prison industrial complex needs short-term to fill as many as 2,500 empty beds in Oklahoma. Long-term, it wants to grow its business, eyeing new facilities in Lawton, Altus, Lindsay and elsewhere.

The problem is, Oklahoma's prison population - which soared from 5,000 to about 25,000 over the last 20 years - has steadied, easing demand for space.

That leaves the Legislature's private prison promoters with two options: close existing state facilities [and transfer inmates to private beds] or broaden the state's criminal code.

Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, leaves no mystery about his preference: He recently requested a cost-analysis of closing three public prisons, then pitched a fit when the numbers didn't support his agenda.

Actually, it's an almost perfect moment for the prison industrial complex to pursue its short- and long-term goals here - and to bolster its bottom line:

- With the state facing a \$900 million budget gap [that will be offset some by federal stimulus money], the appetite for undertaking the costly reconstruction of Oklahoma's penal infrastructure is absent.

- Further, Republican majorities for the first time in both houses eliminate a past roadblock. Democrats typically want to protect state-operated prisons because they preserve state jobs, and state workers frequently are an important

See PRISONS Page 18

Observations

Decaf?

It's ironic that Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, is author of a bill to deny pensions to disgraced and crooked Oklahoma politicians.

Senate Bill 899 would force public officials to forgo a state pension if they are convicted of a crime related to abuse of office. It's a response to the fact that former Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, kept his state pension after being convicted of a federal felony.

Coffee's failure to file an expenditure report and failure to pay his federal taxes are among his many troubles - including hiring an ex-House member for \$140,000 a year as a "political advisor."

That advisor, disgraced ex-Rep. Fred Morgan, took a recent junket to Mexico with lobbyists.

Coffee's bill is on the governor's desk. Elected officials would be held to a higher standard and crooked politicians who violate the public trust will not have a golden parachute when they get caught.

Will Coffee be the first to fall?

Monstrosity

The sorriest anti-public education legislation in state history is being pushed by anti-union Republicans. It could kill Oklahoma's ability to ensure a quality education.

Rep. Scott Inman, D-Del City, said it right about SB 834: "For over 100 years, this Legislature has worked to put more accountability in education and make our schools fair and free. Suddenly, we've reversed course."

SB 834, which passed the House in a heavily partisan vote, would allow school boards to wipe out the accomplishments of HB 1017 under Gov. Henry Bellmon.

Sadly, a bevy of superintendents support the measure, confident they could destroy the Oklahoma Education Association and the Association of Classroom Teachers that now are the only guarantee that teachers receive fair treatment.

ceive fair treatment.

Among the items on the chopping block: class size limits, alternative education options, hiring of guidance counselors and public input on changes to school board policies.

Rather than giving school boards more freedom, one legislator, Rep. Joe Dorman, D-Rush Springs, believes this bill would actually burden them with more bureaucracy. He's right.

Oops! The same day the House passed SB 834, it also passed SB 394 - a mandate that would move the date school districts must notify teachers of their contract renewals.

Rep. Ed Cannaday, D-Parum, believes it's disingenuous to support legislation with mandates and support SB 834 - especially in the same legislative session.

Please Gov. Henry - veto this monstrosity.

Greedheads

Got your stimulus money yet? The banks already have their hands out.

Thanks to President Obama's stimulus package, most Americans saw their paychecks increase April 1. We're supposed to spend that extra money, so we can get our economy back on track.

But if you're like many, your credit card company just jacked up your interest rate, or slapped new fees on your card, even though you make your payments on time. So much for that stimulus!

The banks and credit card issuers are standing in the way of our economic recovery. They take billions in taxpayer bailouts, then turn around and slam us with higher interest rates, lower credit limits, and exorbitant fees, finding new income at our expense.

Some Chase customers were hit with an interest rate hike or a \$120 annual fee and a doubled minimum payment. Capital One hiked rates an average of 5%, and many customers



will see an even bigger jump.

Citibank, one of the biggest bailout beneficiaries, jacked up rates, too. This means we can't spend that stimulus money because we have to give it to the bank.

Rules that would stop these interest rate hikes on your card balances, and crack down on outlandish fees, were approved in December, but won't go into effect until July 2010.

Bills are pending in both the House and Senate to protect us sooner. Tell your members of Congress to move up that date.

Talk, Talk, Talk

One in three Americans under age 65 lacked health coverage in 2007-08.

The cost of health coverage continues to rise, and millions of Americans remain uninsured, including more than 600,000 Oklahomans. More workers are losing their jobs and the health insurance that they rely on.

For too long, the story has been the same: Health reform is the topic of much political and policy talk, talk, talk, but meaningful action to cover the uninsured fails to occur.

An analysis found that 86.7 million people - one out of every three Americans under the age of 65 - was uninsured for some period of time during 2007 and 2008.

These Americans have had to pay for medical care out of their own pockets, or they have had to delay needed care altogether.

Who are these uninsured Americans? No one is protected from the risk of uninsurance. People of all age groups, of every race and ethnicity, and across all income ranges are affected. Half of those uninsured in Oklahoma are children.

Paper Tigers

Feel safer? The State Senate has passed a House resolution demanding the federal government cease and desist mandates beyond its authority as designated by the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

House Joint Resolution 1003 de-

clares Oklahoma's sovereignty under the Tenth Amendment in all matters not otherwise enumerated or granted to the federal government under the U.S. Constitution.

Gee, we thought that was a given.

The resolution also calls on the president and other agents of the federal government to "cease and desist" mandates beyond the scope of "constitutionally delegated powers" and repeal all compulsory federal legislation directing states to comply under threat of civil or criminal sanctions or in order to gain federal funding.

Lawmakers in other reactionary states have been looking into similar resolutions since Oklahoma became the first state to file and pass this wholly worthless Tenth Amendment Legislation.

This is another case of the loons in the Legislature wasting precious time on non-issues while ignoring the real problems of Oklahoma.

Bush's War

The Bush war in Iraq has cost \$656 billion and more billions are on the way. Documented civilian deaths are between 91,121 and 99,500. The data come from Iraq Body Count and a 2006 Lancet study.

Iraqi civilians killed in February 2009: 346, including 11 children.

U.S. casualties thus far top 4,200 deaths and 31,131 wounded in action. U.S. troops deployed to Iraq since 2003: 513,000; deployed more than once: 197,000; deployed three or more times: 53,000.

U.S. soldiers who committed suicide in January 2009 totaled 24, the highest monthly total since the Army started keeping those stats in 1980.

Iraqi unemployment rate: 18%; for men ages 15-29: 28%. Journalists killed in Iraq: 138.

Estimated number of Iraqis displaced since 2003 top five million - nearly 20% of the total population.

Iraqi prison population: 15,100 in U.S. custody; 35,000 in Iraqi custody.

Exit polls show Obama's pledge for a measured withdrawal drew votes from all sides in American politics but it also has drawn fire from the ultra right - Rush Limbaugh, et al.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

www.okobserver.net

FOUNDING PUBLISHER • Helen B. Troy [1970-2006]

[ISSN 0030-1795]

The Oklahoma Observer [USPS 865-720] is published the 10th and 25th of each month, except July 25th and Dec. 25th, by AHB Enterprises LLC, 13912 Plymouth Xing, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, OK 73125.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: 1-Year [22 issues] \$40. Send check to The Oklahoma Observer, P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275. Online: Visit www.okobserver.net to use a credit card.

UPDATE ADDRESSES: Please notify us at least two weeks before your move to ensure uninterrupted service. E-Mail to subscriptions@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

LETTERS TO EDITOR: E-mail to letters@okobserver.net or mail to P.O. Box 14275, Oklahoma City, OK 73113-0275.

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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

Embattled Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, went on a TV talk show to claim the stimulus package is "bribery" and Barack Obama seeks to control state governments. Voters in Coffee's district are greatly underserved.

Laurel: To the Obamas for a \$25,000 gift last year to Catholic Charities [according to their tax returns]. Wonder how much was donated by critics of the President's invitation to Notre Dame?

He is not a showboat, but the children of Oklahoma have a superb friend in Rep. Ron Peters, R-Tulsa. His push for aid for social workers and troubled families is a high-water mark in the dismal 2009 legislative session.

Dart: To Republican Sen. Steve Russell for his attack on Homeland Security for suggesting that Vets could be a target of radical groups. Senator, meet decorated veteran Tim McVeigh. Or the Vet who just killed three policeman in Pittsburgh.

A top guru of James Dobson is charged with two felony counts for enticing a 15-year-old girl for sex. He was met by an FBI agent. Dobson's anti-homosexual guru was nailed for propositioning a gay man in a gay bar.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's public educators, winning the nation's No. 1 ranking in early childhood education. If homeschooler Brandon Dutcher of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs thinks it's baby-sitting, let him sit through a day. He may even learn something.

Why isn't someone booted as the result of more than 200,000 state employee health insurance claims totaling \$100 million going unpaid for up to 18 months? So much for privatizing government programs.

Dart: To Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, for his craven attempt to abolish the Corrections Board, Why? Because Corrections is grossly underfunded and Coffee and his pals are tired of the criticism.

Oklahoma is 10th in child death rates - more than 2,100 dead since 2006 from abuse or accidents. Half of Oklahoma's parents of small children are poor.

Laurel: To Mike Fogarty, head of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, for pointing out that aid for low income children remains mired in the 1960s welfare system. By upgrading the law more Medicaid patients could be served for less.

A college graduate in 2007 owed an average of \$21,900 in student loans. One in 10 students at private colleges have borrowed \$40,000. We are the only major country in the world that considers education an expense, not an investment.

Dart To GOP House Speaker Chris Benge and his gaggle of followers, hyping nuclear power without noting the horrific bill would be picked up by ratepayers - \$6 billion to \$10 billion per nuclear plant.

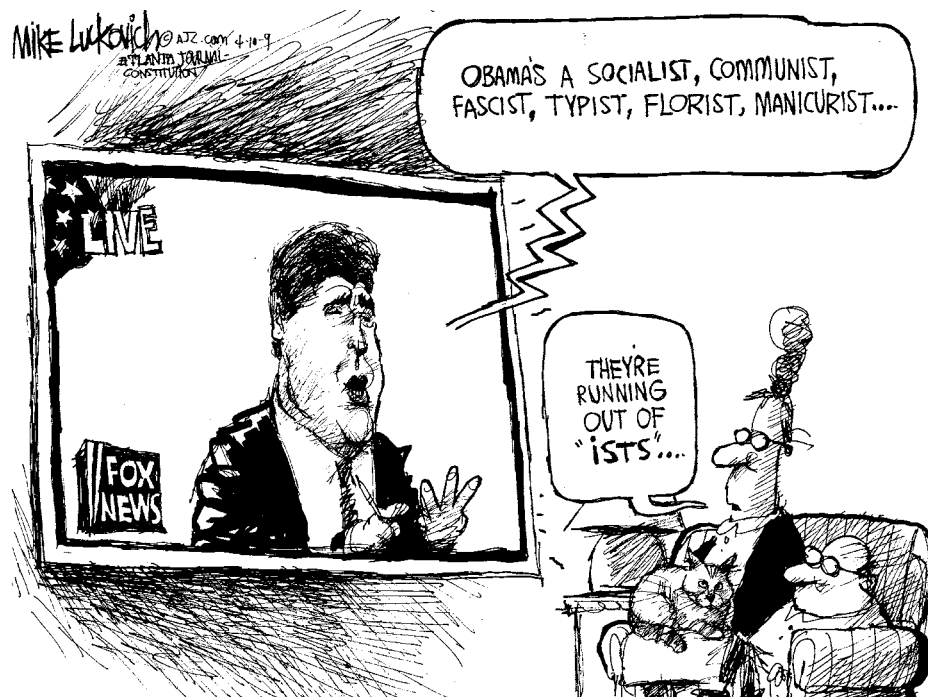
Every Indian tribe in Oklahoma would be permitted to open charter schools under legislation winning passage in the Legislature. Whatever happened to accountability?

Laurel: To Tulsa World's religion reporter Bill Sherman, winner of the Russell Bennett Faith and Courage Award for journalism integrity in covering all religions.

Forbes Magazine's "Billionaires No More" issue includes Chesapeake CEO Aubrey McClendon whose 2008 net worth of \$2.8 billion plunged \$2 billion as a result of a huge drop in gas prices.

Dart: To what passes for an Oklahoma congressional delegation. They all voted against the stimulus while asking for hundreds of millions of "pork."

What is State Rep. Jabar Shumate smoking? He's pushing legislation for more charter schools, claiming, "the better charter schools do the better our other public schools can do as well."



Laurel: To Democratic Leader Rep. Danny Morgan for blowing the lid off HJR 1014, a proposed constitutional amendment that would empower the Legislature by eliminating the state's balanced budget requirement.

Not again! The \$844,000 audit of the Corrections Department is another case of blowing taxpayer money, then ignoring the results. It was the brainchild of Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, a big fan of private prisons.

Dart: To Rep. David Dank, R-OKC, for an op-ed piece hyping deregulation of public schools. Make no mistake, Republicans are determined to destroy public education in favor of vouchers.

Oklahoma racks up \$4.4 billion a year in lost productivity and premature deaths due to lack of adequate mental health programs.

Laurel: To Broken Arrow High School students for the 20th year of sponsoring a one-day blood drive. BA students have donated more than 5,000 units of blood.

Four legislators have won recognition from the Oklahoma Wildlife Management Association as Wildlife Advocates - Sen. Mike Schultz, R-Altus; Sen. John Sparks, D-Norman; Rep. Don Armes, R-Faxon, and Rep. Phil Richardson, R-Chickasha.

Dart: To a Legislature wasting critical time on non-issues - Voter ID, a Ten Commandments monument, English as the official language, etc. - while 180,000 Oklahoma kids go to bed hungry.

Oklahoma leads the nation in locking up women - 129 per 100,000 - 50% above the national average. But more importantly, 66% of them have children.

Laurel: To Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, for the new law creating a Silver Alert to trace missing senior citizens just as the Amber Alert searches for missing children.

We had a call asking what the 1,530 flags were for on the Capitol's south lawn. They represent American kids who died during 2007 from abuse or neglect. Thirty-two were killed in Oklahoma last year.

Dart: To House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, for SJR 12 calling for a vote of the people on term limits for statewide elected officials. What do you expect from a man who thinks Taco Bell is the Mexican Telephone Company.

This is National Volunteer Week, and our heartiest congratulations to Oklahoma's Legal Aid Services and the fine men and women who serve as public defenders for a pittance.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma delegation heading to the American Bar Association's National Summit May 7-9 in Chicago, designed to foster cooperation and communications among the three branches of state government.

The English as Official Language drive by Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, is a clear violation of the 14th Amendment's due process guarantee. If Terrill wins passage and if the governor signs it, look for the courts to settle it.

Dart: To Senate Republicans for voting against Sen. Jim Wilson's amendment to outlaw all abortions - period. The Tahlequah Democrat was making the point that abortion is strictly political for the GOP. Democrats should use the vote as a wedge issue in the next election.

Despite a favorable ruling from the Federal Elections Commission, Attorney General Drew Edmondson is now targeted by the Oklahoma House pest, Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC. Is it true Reynolds stared at a can of orange juice for 20 minutes because it said concentrate?

Laurel: To Sen. J. Paul Gumm, D-Durant, for his fierce battle to require health insurance companies to include autism - fastest growing health problem in America.

Let's hear it for the Jesuit priesthood, defending Notre Dame's decision to invite President Barack Obama to deliver the commencement address and receive an honorary doctorate.

Dart: To our state's leaders, failing miserably to adequately fund programs to protect children. There were 63,493 cases of abuse reported last year and 11,711 were confirmed. More than 76% of the abusers were biological parents.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer


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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Question: What do you get when you cross a brown-recluse with a fiddle-back?

Answer: A U.S. Senator from Kansas.

P.S. Actually, I just meant this as a joke, although he [Sen. Sam Brownback] is definitely on or near the bottom of my acceptance list of Republican senators. This is a nice way of saying I don't like him.

J.A. Gowman
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

There are a lot of fringe cases out there – just look at the shootings in the past few weeks, many of them spooked by some fictitious fear about guns being taken away.

They say if you repeat a lie often enough it becomes truth. I get angry particularly when I keep hearing that lie about guns being taken away, over and over again. It feeds into the mindset of the people who already hate our current president and are just looking for an opening and an excuse.

We've seen firsthand here in Oklahoma City just what can happen when one or two paranoid right-wingers who are continually fed this and other ridiculous and fictitious nonsense by talk radio and conservative media actually take action.

No one is saying the conservative media should be silenced, but they need to understand words have meaning and consequences. Our right to free speech means you can say what you want. However, you can't yell "fire" in a crowded theater, yet we've got the right-wing with a loud megaphone and echo chamber doing just that.

We've got Glenn Beck basically hawking the outrageous war scenario that sounds eerily similar to the one that comes right out of the pages of the *Turner Diaries* [the book that inspired the bombing of our federal building] on Fox News; we've got Fox News and right-wing talk radio "mainstreaming" the ideas of militias and tea parties.

Then you have Limbaugh and Hannity – the very guys who essentially said "if you didn't support the President [Bush] you gave aid and comfort to the terrorists" – now inspiring sedition and borderline treason against President Obama.

Here's the sadly ironic part: Many here in Oklahoma [the very state victimized by far right-wing conservative anti-government terrorism] now em-

brace that far right-wing conservative, anti-government ideology and share that same unfortunate and delusional philosophy of the McVeighs out there, stocking up on guns and ammunition, invoking some paranoid, absurd fear of my president taking their civil liberties away.

Yet Oklahoma was the loudest cheerleader for Bush while he actually did take away civil liberties! Even though Bush's approval rating was a lowly 28% at the end of 2008, this state was the reason he still had an approval rating.

Hmm, anybody remember that statement President Obama made about people "clinging to their guns?"

J.M. Madrid
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I just read a headline on [KOCO-TV, OKC] that Mary Fallin stated that if any workers compensation [reform] legislation reached her desk as governor, she would definitely sign it.

By this statement, she is confirming she would represent companies and corporations in her actions, should she be elected governor.

We are curious: Is there any one elected official in this state that represents the workers?

Tom Magdalena
Tecumseh

Editor, The Observer:

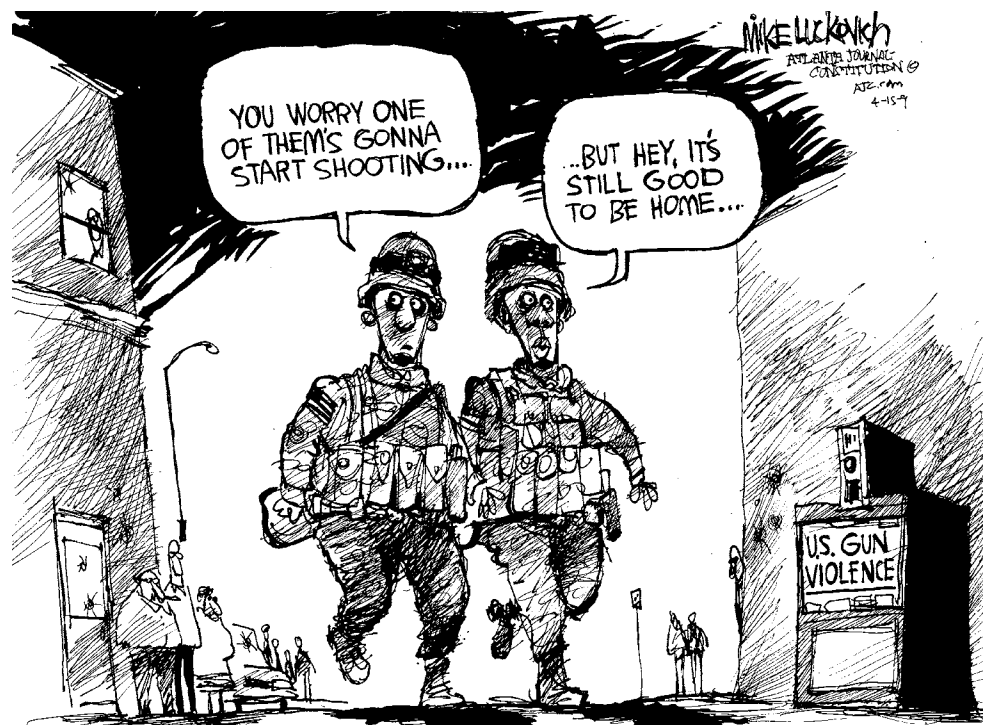
You can't make this stuff up. Well, I guess you could, but I'm not.

Apparently Michelle Obama has planted an organic garden at the White House in partnership with a local elementary school class. Who could possibly get upset over that? Why, it's those wacky wingnuts, of course. The big chemical companies have a lobbying group called the Mid-America Crop Life Association [MACA] and they're all in a dither over this concept of an organic garden.

They're just frothing at the mouth because Michele Obama isn't using chemicals in her organic garden.

The lobbying group actually sent an e-mail to their members and supporters that said, "While a garden is a great idea, the thought of it being organic made us shudder." What a scary thought ... an organic garden producing vegetables free of chemicals! MACA took it a step further and published a letter they mailed to Michelle Obama asking her to use chemicals in her garden, which they called "crop protection products."

Maybe it's just me, but I thought



the concept of an organic garden is to grow things chemical-free.

Apparently the big chemical companies are really, really worried that those elementary school children won't get enough chemicals in their diets if this idea catches on.

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Someone, please, reveal if this "Trillions Of Barrels Of Oil Discovered" in the April 10 issue is really an April Fools Joke, with no author credential, and surely for the scoop of the century a strange silence in the press at large.

Harry Compton
Bartlesville

Editor's Reply: We erred by not investigating the article further. As it turns out, it's a mixture of accurate and inaccurate information – in other words, it's the stuff of urban legends.

According to snopes.com, the story originated with a "tout sheet intended to sell subscriptions to an investment newsletter. It is vaguely true in the sense that geologists have estimated there is a good deal of undiscovered, technically recoverable oil in [the Bakken formation]" that would be increasingly viable economically when the price of crude oil spikes, as it did last summer. The U.S. Geological Survey assessment showed "a 25-fold increase in the amount of oil that can be recovered compared to the agency's 1995 estimate of 151 million barrels of oil" – far short of the 503 billion barrels cited in the article.

For more information, visit www.snopes.com/politics/gasoline/bakken.asp

Editor, The Observer:

The Salvation Army, Assemblies of God, and Unitarian, Jewish, and my United Methodist churches are doing a wonderful thing: They invite Mamas to preach the gospel.

What is it a teacher says to control an unruly student? "I'll call your Mama!"

That is the hammer that works.

Here are churches which keep Mamas muzzled in church services in spite of these "Mama Superiors" being the driving force in their faiths:

1. Roman Catholic Church – 66 million members. Pope Benedict worships Mother Mary but reasons only boys can be priests because the original apostles were male. Mary Magdalene was just as much an apostle as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

2. Southern Baptist Convention – 16 million members. These Baptists say the wife's duty is to "submit herself graciously" to her husband's leadership and follow bachelor Apostle Paul's lead, remain silent in churches. Women do preach in their Sunday schools and church camps.

3. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints – 5 million members. Mormons say women might become "priestesses and queens" but only in the afterlife.

4. Seventh Day Adventist – Ellen White, its co-founder, was a woman yet no member of her sex can be in the ministry.

This lack of religious equality keeps Oklahoma women in the political doghouse because Okies aren't used to hearing it from a woman.

In 102 years, our state has had only two U.S. congresswomen – Alice Mary Robertson in 1920 and Mary Fallin in 2006. We have never had a woman in the U.S. Senate like our neighbors Missouri, Arkansas, Texas and Kansas.

We Okie girls have taxation without representation, the battle cry of the American revolution. We are 51% of the U.S. population so we deserve 50% of all legislative bodies. One woman, one vote.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

Dick Cheney is an evil man! He is probably having his ego trampled due to his view that George W. Bush was incapable of governing without him pulling George's strings. Yet, Georgie boy is pulling in millions in speaking engagements, book deals, etc., while Cheney is getting no credit for being the "real" power.

It couldn't happen to a more deserving oilman, could it?

May he fade into obscurity, quickly and permanently. How he has stayed alive this long with that bum ticker is the \$64 question!

Darla Reynolds Sparks
Yukon

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Frosty's Notebook

Dropouts

Nothing – absolutely nothing – has a more tragic impact both socially and financially on Oklahoma than high school dropouts.

Approximately 6,900 of Oklahoma's high school graduation class of 2010 will drop out of school before they earn a high school diploma.

Three-fourths of the state prison inmates are dropouts, as are 59% of federal inmates. In fact, dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be incarcerated in their lifetime.

More than 50% of young adult dropouts were unemployed and 69.8% of those attaining a high school diploma were employed.

The difference? More than 86% of those with a college degree were employed.

Most dropouts are young, restless and jobless. Their growing unemployment malaise is especially difficult in these difficult economic times.

Want proof? In Oklahoma expected earnings for dropouts is \$16,683 a year. Those with a high school diploma average \$22,290 a year. With a four-year college degree it's \$36,974 a year. [Census Bureau]

Dropouts are substantially more likely to rely on public assistance than those with a high school diploma.

Estimated lifetime revenue loss for male dropouts ages 25 to 34 is \$944 billion. The cost to the public of their crime and welfare benefits is estimated to total \$24 billion annually.

Average life expectancy in 2000 for all Americans was 77.8 years. In Oklahoma – 74.6 years. For Oklahoma dropouts it is 66.2 years.

What is Oklahoma's response to the soaring costs of students dropping out of school? The Statewide Alternative Education Academy Grant Program.

Since its inception in 1996, Oklahoma's dropout rate has steadily declined from an annual rate of 5.5% in 1997 to 3.2% in 2007.

In 12 years, the Alternative Education program has served 141,055 students, many of them throw-away kids as a result of chronic truancy or misbehavior. Far too many come from single parent homes.

The Oklahoma Department of Commerce [2008] estimates that increasing the number of students with high school diplomas [or equivalent] would make a real difference.

No Place For Sick Old Men

The medical parole program launched in Oklahoma nine years ago has resulted in 135 inmates being released since the onset of the program.

Bob Mann, director of social work services for Oklahoma's prison system, told USA Today that there have been only "one or two inmates" who returned to prison from medical parole status.

"Those were offenders of lesser crimes. If I recall, they got involved in drugs once they were released ... Most of the inmates are sent home to die," he said.

At the other extreme consider the case of Nick Montos, age 92, an inmate at the Massachusetts Correctional Institute, that state's oldest prisoner.

Montos has been incarcerated for over 13 years. Convicted of two separate robberies, he would have to reach age 132 to complete his sentences.

Don't Blame Obama

I hate to rain on the teabaggers' parade but they are wrong in blaming the financial difficulties of the states on President Barack Obama. Check the record.

Of the \$787 billion in "stimulus" money President Obama authorized with his pen on Feb. 17, at least \$144 billion was earmarked for a particularly unstimulating purpose: covering budget deficits of state governments, including Oklahoma.

The 12-digit sum, touted as "state and local fiscal relief" on the Administration's glass-half-full website recovery.gov, quickly exposed a fault line between the nation's governors.

On one side were a handful of fiscal conservatives, led by Republicans Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Mark Sanford of South Carolina, arguing that bailouts and federal mandates create moral hazards and unfunded liabilities requiring future tax hikes.

The other, more powerful side, was represented by Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger of California who said he would be glad to take the money turned down by a couple of hypocritical governors.

In Oklahoma, a profligate Legislature and a pandering governor cut taxes \$720 million when the state was flush with oil and gas money.

With a \$900 million hole in a \$7 billion budget, our Oklahoma "leaders" are anxious to use the stimulus money to paper over the shortfall. More than \$500 million in the Rainy Day Fund will be used next year, which may be even worse.

But does California, or any other state, really "need" federal money during this economic downturn? Only if you accept the premise that state budgets should be in the red.

Ironic, isn't it, that our deeply religious Oklahoma Republican legislators gloss over that portion of the Bible calling for good stewardship.

It's hard to fault the factually-challenged masses who turned out on teabag day since they are victims of a media that has eschewed the No. 1 priority of journalism – to inform public opinion.



Increase annual earned income by \$830 million; increase the state GDP by \$2 billion; increase the state's annual revenues by almost \$76 million; save more than \$12 billion in lifetime health costs; and save more than \$63 million annually in crime-related costs.

According to the dropout cost model developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association [Johnston, 2001], each dropout cost state and federal government approximately \$200,000 over their lifetimes.

These costs are based on estimates of lost income and tax revenue and the costs of increased job training, welfare, unemployment, criminal justice, and other direct assistance.

During the 2007-08 school year, as reported in the 2008 Statewide Academy Evaluation Report produced by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center, 896 recovered dropouts had positive outcomes [graduated, earned a GED, or returned to traditional school].

Alternative Education saved the state and federal government \$179,200,000 – a sum 10 times greater than the annual budget for Alternative Education.

Montos has undergone triple bypass surgery. He has cancer. He depends on a cane and the assistance of other prisoners to walk. Montos' fellow inmates are assisting him in other ways, too.

In a filing prepared by an inmate committee, the point is made that Massachusetts taxpayers spend about \$43,000 yearly to incarcerate each healthy prisoner, but that it costs the taxpayers up to \$100,000 annually to incarcerate Montos in view of his medical issues.

Non-violent prisoners over the age of 70 should qualify for less expensive alternatives including release under supervised parole conditions, 24-hour electronic or GPS monitoring and supervised home confinement.

Thirty six states have established programs that allow the release of terminally ill or severely infirm prisoners.

The driving force behind medical furloughs or humanitarian paroles is the expensive cost of institutional medical care, according to Ron McCuan, a public health analyst with the National Institute of Corrections.

Prison should not be a place for dying old men. Oklahoma's program should be accelerated.

Hopefully, Massachusetts and 13 other states that do not have compassionate release laws will follow the examples of the states that have already enacted such laws.

Pandering

It's not news that George W. Bush solidified his 30 million fundamentalist base by liberally sprinkling tens of millions of your tax dollars on purely religious programs such as:

- \$282,000 to the World Impact Youth Program. A Christian missions organization seeking to present Christ to the unchurched through all our ministries.
- \$375,000 to Camp Barnabas. Volunteers should ready to help us spread the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- \$595,000 to Morning Star Ranch, made available only to followers of Christ.
- \$490,000 to Detroit Rescue Missions Summer Camp, a Christian summer camping experience.
- \$250,000 to St. Richard Catholic Parish in Chicago, a church-sponsored community center.

We have no doubt that these are worthy programs, but are they due federal dollars? I think not.

No one died when Clinton lied.

Teabaggers Wrong And Racist

The Truth About Taxes

By Frosty Troy

Attention teabaggers! At least do your homework before you rally. You have a First Amendment right to protest but sadly you are an ignorant minority.

From Rush Limbaugh to George Will, the cry is going out that Americans are oppressed by high and unfair taxes.

Do the rich really pay over a third of their income in federal income taxes? In 2006, the 400 highest-income Americans paid an effective rate of 17.2%.

Most Americans were the silent majority on teabag day. The truth? A new Gallup Poll found that 62% of respondents felt that the federal income tax they paid this year is "fair."

When asked about the specific amount of federal income taxes they pay, over half felt they paid the right amount or too little[!].

The one complaint often heard is that Americans who work hard and become successful have to pay over a third of their income in federal income taxes.

OKLAHOMA 50TH IN TOTAL TAXES

Despite hand-made signs, Oklahomans are not overtaxed. The Tax Foundation reported in January that Oklahoma is 50th in combined local, state and federal taxes combined.

Some of the protesters were clearly racist, spouting the lies that the President is not an American citizen, that he is the new Hitler and he is taking America down the low road to socialism. Some depicted him as a monkey.

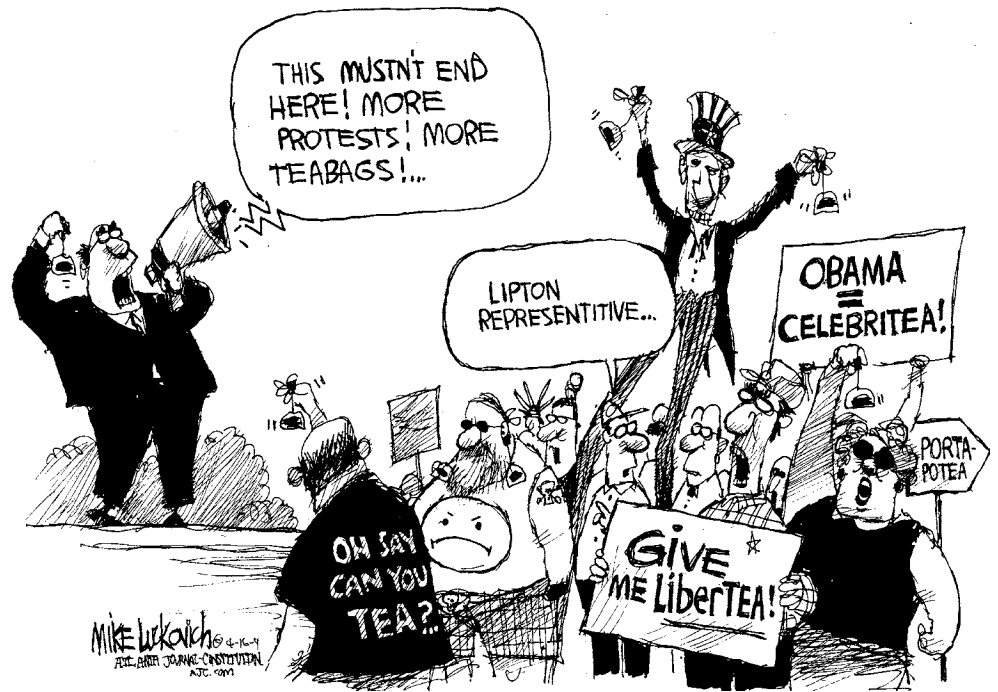
None of the speakers acknowledged that the Legislature has passed more than \$720 million in tax cuts in the past three years – and Gov. Brad Henry signed them all.

IRS data show that the federal income tax rates paid by the highest-income Americans have dropped substantially since 2000, largely due to cuts in the tax rates on capital gains and dividends pushed through by the Bush Administration.

WORK TAXED MORE THAN INVESTMENTS

While income from work [salaries and wages] is subject to rates as high as 35%, income from investments [long-term capital gains and stock dividends] is taxed at only 15%.

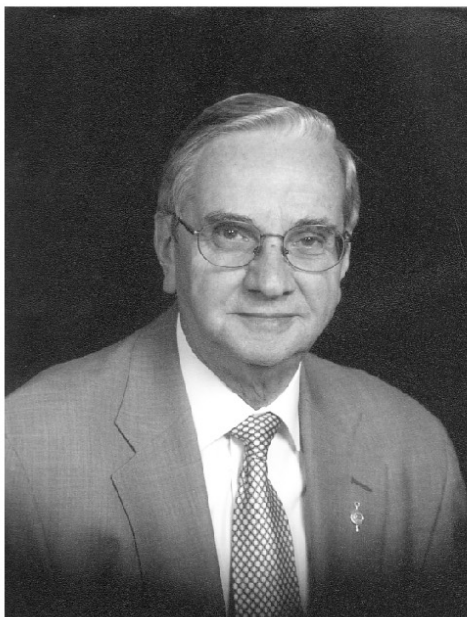
The IRS report shows that in 2006 [the latest year for which data are available],



the 400 richest income tax fliers paid just 17.2% of their adjusted gross income [AGI] in federal income taxes.

That is down from 22.3% in 2000, and is less than half of the top statutory income tax rate of 35%. Almost 65% of the income reported by those 400 taxpayers

See TAXES Page 9



*The Oklahoma Democratic Party invites you to the
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Bashing Lawyers A Republican Hoax

Between Republican legislators and the Daily Disappointment Oklahomans are led to believe the state is losing business because of lawyers and our pro-lawyer court system. That's flatly false.

The truth? A comprehensive study relying on Oklahoma Department of Commerce data found Oklahoma to be the fourth most pro-business state in the country.

Forbes magazine lists Tulsa as having the third lowest cost of doing business and Oklahoma City fourth lowest. They are among 150 metropolitan areas measured for labor, energy and tax costs.

Oklahoma's economic standing improved significantly, according to a report released by Creighton University economists in Omaha, NE. Oklahoma's Business Conditions Index has risen, climbing to 54.5.

Oklahoma's rise bucks a dip in the survey's nine-state Mid-American region. Any reading above 50 means the economy should expand during the next three to six months.

The regional aviation scene looks bright. Victor Bird, director of the state's aeronautics commission, says the aviation industry is "where it's at" in Oklahoma.

"We're very fortunate in Oklahoma," he said. "We have 400 aerospace companies making Oklahoma home."

ANALYSTS ARE OPTIMISTIC

An analysis by the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce concluded that energy continues to fuel growth; construction demand is strong; professional and business, education and health sectors expect growth and the government sector provides stability.

The Republican myth in the Legislature is that tort lawsuits result in a "tort tax" on each person in the United States.

Tillinghest-Towers Perrin, an insurance industry consulting firm admitted in its annual "Trends and Findings on the Cost of the U.S. Tort System" that the tort system has nothing to do with the costs of litigation, courts, or the legal system.

The costs tabulated by the Economic Policy Institute study are not a reflection of litigated claims.

BLAMING TORT LITIGATION IS WRONG

The claim that tort litigation [frivolous lawsuits] is driving liability insurance premiums to excessive levels, reducing real wages and overall employment is not true, the institute reported.

Opponents claim it is undermining corporate profits, dampening productivity growth, discouraging research and development, and generally reducing the willingness of corporations and individuals to take reasonable risks [such as introducing new products] that may benefit themselves and society.

MAKING SPECIOUS CLAIMS

There is scant evidence for any of these claims. To the contrary, macroeconomics trends since the early 1990s are especially inconsistent with the argument that supposedly high and rapidly rising tort costs have inflicted serious harm on the economy.

Myth: Tort lawsuits are causing high insurance premiums. The Center for Justice & Democracy, using data from every state, found the liability insurance "crisis" is a result of the economic cycle of the insurance industry and not a "tort law cost explosion."

There is no patient benefit in tort reform. Insurance companies will not promise to reduce rates even if jury awards are capped.

INSURANCE RATES NOT THE ISSUE

Sherman Joyce, president of the American Tort Reform Association, stated, "We wouldn't tell you or anyone that the reason to pass tort reform would be to reduce insurance rates.

"Many tort reform advocates do not contend that restricting litigation will lower insurance rates, and I have never said that in 30 years."

The report "Medical Malpractice Caps: The Impact of Damage Caps on Physician Premiums," by Weiss Ratings, Inc., a company that rates insurance companies' financial strength, revealed that in states with caps, the median annual premium went up by 48.2%. But, surprisingly, in states without caps [such as Oklahoma], the median annual premium increased at a slower clip - by 35.9%.

CHECK THE FACTS

Among the states with caps, only 10.5% experienced flat or declining medical malpractice premiums. In contrast, among the states without caps, the record was actually better: 18.7% experienced flat or declining premiums.

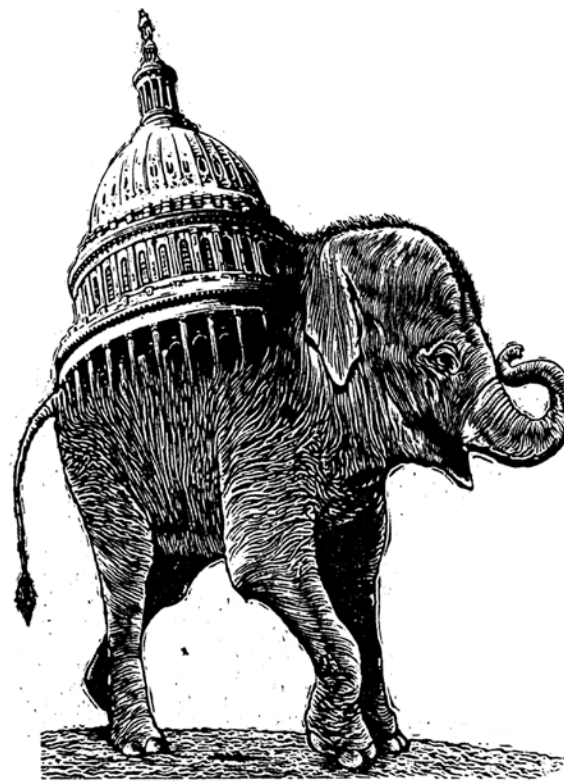
These counter-intuitive findings can lead to only one conclusion: There are other, far more important factors, driving the rise in medical malpractice premiums than caps or payouts.

A study by the Congressional Budget Office [Limiting Tort Liability for Medical Malpractice] found " ... even large savings in premiums can have only a small direct impact on health care spending - private or governmental - because malpractice costs account for less than 2% of that spending."

JUDGMENTS AND SETTLEMENTS

Judgments at trial account for 4% of all malpractice payments; settlements account for the remaining 96%.

"A preoccupation with data on judgments, extreme awards or specific specialties, results in an incomplete understanding of the growth of physician malpractice payments." [Rand Institute for Civil Justice]. The Rand study says malprac-



tice payouts aren't rising.

"A study by the Center for Justice and Democracy, a consumer advocacy group in New York, compiled from regulatory filings by insurers, finds that net claims for medical malpractice paid by 15 leading insurance companies have remained flat over the last five years, while net premiums have surged 120%."

INSURERS INFLATING RATES

Malpractice insurers are inflating rates. A new study by Missouri's former top insurance regulator concludes that insurers are vastly overcharging physicians for malpractice premiums.

The study found that medical malpractice insurers paid out just 30 cents of every dollar that doctors paid in premiums last year.

The leading malpractice insurers took in three times as much in premiums last year as they paid out in claims. Collectively, the 15 insurers increased their earned premiums by 9.3%, although the amount they estimated they would pay out in the future declined by more than 21%.

USE THE MARKET, NOT LOSSES

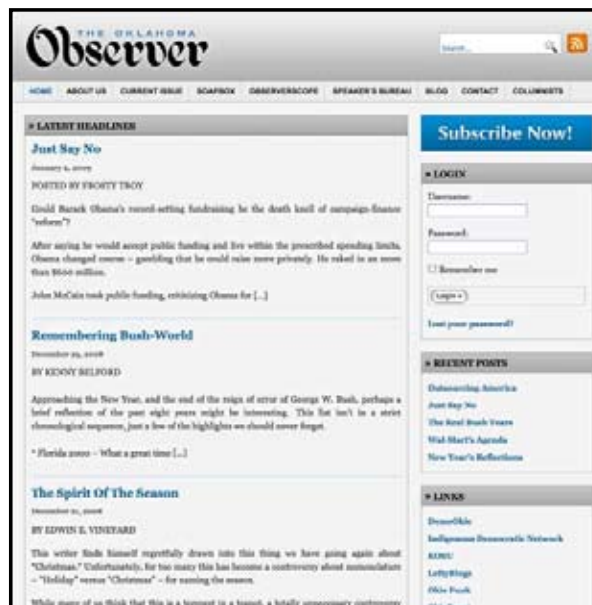
The Center for Justice & Democracy suggests insurers set premiums based on the market, not their losses.

See **LAWYERS Page 18**

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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A Drama In One Act

Legislative Follies: Where Would Jesus Go?

By John R. Price

All the action takes place in Heaven. As the play opens, Jesus is talking with Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter, two of his closest friends and most trusted advisors.

Jesus: I think it's about time for me to make a second visit to Earth. Some folks there are getting impatient. Maybe I shouldn't make them wait much longer.

Peter: What's the first stop on your itinerary?

Jesus: There's this little place called Oklahoma. I hear there are lots of churches there, so I should get a really big welcome.

Peter: [Pause.] Oklahoma? Well there may be a few problems with that.

Jesus: How could there be any problems? Isn't Oklahoma called "The Buckle on the Bible Belt?" Sounds like the perfect place to begin my visit.

Peter: Well, first of all, there is this problem with language. The only language that the governing authorities want spoken is English, and you speak Aramaic.

Jesus: And also Hebrew. I learned Hebrew in Synagogue school.

Peter: I don't think that will help.

Jesus: Why not? Don't they know how many different languages my followers speak, not to mention everybody else?

Peter: They seem to think that's way too many. I'm not sure why.

Mary M: And there is another problem as well. If you can't prove who you are, you could be arrested as an illegal alien.

Jesus: That should be easy. Luke wrote a great biography of me. It documents clearly where I was born and where I lived all my life.

Mary M: I don't think that will help. You will need a notarized original copy. And Luke's original document is written in Greek.

Jesus: They'll provide a translator, won't they?

Mary M: That would be illegal.

Peter: There's more.

Jesus: [Incredulous] What more can there be?

Peter: You will have to have a photo I.D.

Jesus: That should be no problem. My picture is hanging in churches all over



the state.

Mary M: I don't think that would help. You're five foot four, and your hair and eyes are dark. And don't forget what all those years in the hot Palestinian sun did to your skin. I don't think they would recognize you from your pictures.

Jesus: Alright, I'll just work some miracles. That should convince them who I am.

Peter: There is a problem with that word "work." You will have to have a green card, before, as a non-citizen, you can work.

Jesus: OK, let's use the "shock and awe" option. I'll have Gabriel call up a battalion of angels, and we'll arrive from the sky at noon with trumpets blaring and everybody singing the "Hallelujah" chorus.

Peter: Oklahomans are very touchy about "outsiders" stirring things up. They are also armed to the teeth.

Mary M: And then there is this thing called "homeland security" that takes a dim view of unauthorized border crossings, especially by people from the Middle East.

Jesus: [Sighing] Where do you think I should begin then?

Peter: Maybe Antarctica. I saw this documentary called "March of the Penguins." There appears to be a very peaceable society in Antarctica.

- The author lives in Park Hill, OK

Officially, Language Issue A Waste Of Time

By Edwin E. Vineyard

The question of making English the official language for the State of Oklahoma has been around for a long time. This writer recalls sitting in the gallery in the House of Representatives 30 years ago, waiting for the chamber to take up a piece of higher education legislation. During this period, Rep. Jim Dunlap from Bartlesville was defending his bill to make English the official language. He lost, but he brought it up again and again.

I did not fully understand at that time what was wrong with that idea.

This effort has intensified the last few years, especially since Republicans have been in control of any part of the Legislature. Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, has been sponsoring all the tough legislation against immigrants, and seems to take great delight in the spotlight of controversy he creates.

TERRILL LOVES LIMELIGHT

He appears to thoroughly enjoy appearing in front of the TV cameras, except when he has to defend his failure to list all assets in a bankruptcy filing. But then, again, we are not sure that he doesn't like that as well. There is an old saying among politicians, "It doesn't matter what the newspapers say about me as long as they spell my name right."

There is another bill sponsored by Sen. Patrick Anderson from Enid, a much more reasonable Republican senator, and it refers to English as the common language. It makes English the common language for conducting state business. But there are exceptions for instances where state or federal laws require otherwise, thus eliminating one basis for challenging the constitutionality of such legislation.

Further, the Anderson bill is supported by groups affected - Indian tribes and Hispanics, primarily. They see the Terrill bill as unduly harsh and discriminatory, and they believe it to be a hostile attack on non-traditional citizens. They will contest it legally.

GULLIBILITY OF VOTERS

It should be easy to discern which of these bills deserves support. Terrill's bill is extreme, and he knows that. Facing a gubernatorial veto, he wants to hold up the Anderson bill, pass his bill first as a referendum, and force the issue to a public ballot at a future election.

Terrill appears to be counting on the gullibility of Oklahoma voters for right-

See LANGUAGE Page 16

Empowering Public Schools To Fail

By Margy McClain

SB 834 is an attack on the existence of public education. This bill, touted as an "empowerment" act, empowers school districts to fail. It accomplishes this in two major ways:

1] SB 834 deregulates school districts without providing accountability. State regulation has emerged over time IN RESPONSE TO problems schools have faced. SB 834 is much more than minor deregulation of the public schools. With this bill [which will include every district in the state by 2014], school districts will have to reinvent the wheel, with no timely oversight or checks and balances.

2] The bill attacks teachers, the very people who already make the most sacrifices, in terms of income and quality of life, to guide all of our children to a chance at a good life.

SB834, the so-called "School District Empowerment Program," calls for school districts throughout Oklahoma to adhere only to the regulations required of Charter Schools in Oklahoma, plus several others that have been put into the bill as amendments.

ABANDONING ACCOUNTABILITY

These amendments try to answer the critiques coming from individuals and groups knowledgeable about education, but leave in the most destructive components.

1] No oversight is provided in the bill. In an environment of intense interest in "accountability," "deregulation" means "no accountability!"

In the past few years, as a nation we have trusted our economic institutions to regulate themselves, and in return are seeing the entire economy fall apart. Public schools are complex institutions that have been built with the input of many parts of society.

To put most of a school district's functioning into the hands of elected, frequently-changing school boards rolls back the clock to the "local control" of the mid-1800s, when teachers could not marry.

DON'T BLAME TEACHERS

The many institutional challenges that public schools face do not lie exclusively on the backs of teachers, but as much or more on the decisions made by state legislatures and school districts themselves.

Human endeavors, like our financial and educational institutions, are as flawed as human beings are. We come together to create ways to conduct our business and raise our children together.

Our institutions are always works in progress because there are always ways to improve them. And institutions require regulations, accountability and checks

See DEREGULATION Page 19

Public Forum

Monument Debate Fuels Religious Hate

By Tom Brennan

On April 13, the LeFlore County Commissioners met in Poteau and approved a proposal to place a Ten Commandments monument on the courthouse lawn. The proposal was modeled after the one placed in Stigler at the Haskell County Courthouse and similar to one proposed for the State Capitol grounds. Proponents in LeFlore County argued that the monument was necessary to remind people that we are a nation founded on Christianity.

The United States Supreme Court ruled that such monuments when erected with the intent of advancing a particular religion were unconstitutional because they violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment. I strongly support this separation of church and state and so I attended this meeting of the LeFlore County Commissioners so that some opposing view could be heard.

Supporters of official displays of the Commandments sometimes will thinly veil their true intentions by claiming the monument is historical. The proponents and commissioners of LeFlore County were very forthcoming on their reasons for erecting this monument.

Citizens spoke of the need to take back the government from the atheists and Muslims and return our country to God and Christianity.

I could sense the level of anger in the room rising. Some in the room could be heard saying "Amen!" and I began to wonder if it was a revival rather than a commissioner's meeting.

MIRRORING MIDDLE EAST THEOCRACIES

I tried to explain that the monument is no different than Middle Eastern theocracies. I reasoned with those in the room that Europe was devastated by centuries of wars because of state-sponsored religion.

Our founding fathers followed the advice of enlightenment thinkers and separated the church and the state. I also suggested to the commissioners that the county could lose a lot of money in a potential lawsuit.

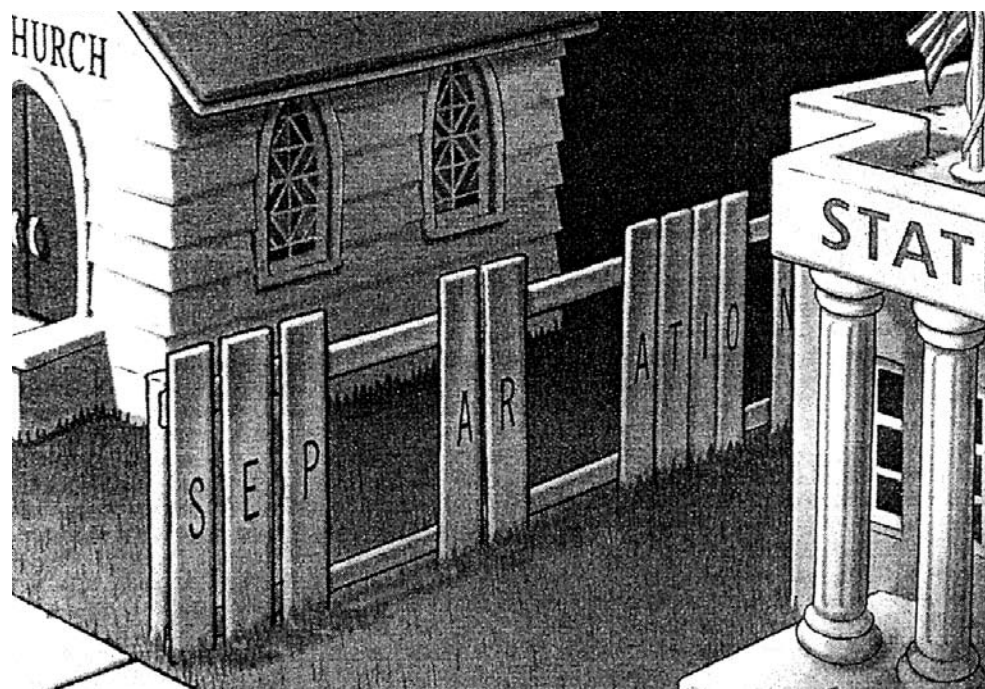
County Commissioner Lance Smith responded that if only one person looks at the monument and becomes a Christian, then it is worth it. I tried to explain that as many as 30% of Americans are non-Christian and the monument would be a violation of their rights.

NON-BELIEVERS 'WILL BURN IN HELL'

Smith expressed outrage that there were so many non-Christians because that is "30% of Americans who will burn in hell." People were becoming angry. One man began to belligerently cross-examine me as if it were the Spanish Inquisition.

The commissioners mercifully took a 3-0 vote supporting the monument rather than risk further arousing passions.

The meeting reminded me of a news report I saw of the people in Stigler at an organized rally in support of their commandments display. A resident told the



news camera that no one at the rally would dare speak out against us because that person may find themselves strung from a tree.

HATRED OF NON-CHRISTIANS

There is another reason behind the movement to place the Ten Commandments on public properties throughout the country. The reason is certainly not historical for if it were, a more appropriate monument would have the First Amendment engraved on it.

Some say the movement is religious because many are trying to evangelize their version of Christianity. If that were the case, proponents would need only place the monument on a church lawn rather than use the government to display the monuments.

No, the reason behind this movement is much more dangerous.

What I heard at this meeting was unbridled, absolute hate of non-Christians. The anger and tension was palpable.

NOT WELCOME IN HEAVEN OR OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma state legislators may be better at disguising their hate and prejudice but their message in placing the Ten Commandments on public property remains clear: convert to our religious beliefs and you will be accepted here and in heaven. Deny these teachings and you are not welcome in heaven or in Oklahoma.

The monument thus becomes state-sanctioned prejudice toward religious minorities. DeToqueville warned Americans of tyranny of the majority. Once the state advances a particular religion we should not be surprised if citizens display prejudice. We should not be surprised if crimes are committed against Muslims and atheists.

If left unchecked and without opposition, we should not then be surprised if the state next becomes a party to these crimes.

- The author lives in Poteau

TAXES

From Page 6

consisted of capital gains and dividends subject to the preferential rates.

The IRS report, which shows the effective federal income tax rates paid by the 400 highest-income Americans in each year since 1992 offers an important opportunity to understand how the tax system affects the most privileged Americans.

Only those with at least \$110 million of AGI were members of this group in 2006, and the average AGI for these 400 taxpayers was \$263 million.

Each one of these 400 taxpayers enjoyed, on average, more than \$169 million of net capital gains and dividend income that was subject to special lower tax rates in 2006.

Although 400 returns are less than 1/1000th of a percent of the total individual tax returns filed, these 400 taxpayers collected almost 8% of the total preferential-rate capital gains and dividends in the nation in 2006.

TAX BILLS DROP FOR RICHEST 400

These 400 taxpayers paid income taxes averaging \$45 million in 2006. As a share of AGI, their tax bills averaged 17.2%.

This decline from 22.3% to 17.2% represented a total tax cut of \$5.4 billion in 2006 for this group, or an average tax cut of over \$13 million each.

"This valuable data confirms what we already knew - that the very richest Americans are paying much less of their income in tax than many would have us believe," noted Citizens for Tax Justice director Robert S. McIntyre.

"These taxpayers are now paying lower effective tax rates than at any time since the IRS began publishing these data in 1992 - and the Bush Administration's capital gains tax cuts are the main culprit."

Forty-eight percent of respondents in the Gallup Poll thought that the amount of federal income tax they pay is "about right." That's the highest percentage of people who responded that way since 1956. [Another 3% thought they paid too little.]

LESS THAN HALF FEEL OVER-TAXED

Fewer than half of those polled, 46%, said they thought their federal income taxes are "too high." It appears, however, that some of these respondents are basing their answers on rightwing, anti-tax propaganda they've heard rather than

their own income tax liability.

In particular, 39% of respondents with incomes below \$30,000 said that they thought the federal income taxes they pay are "too high."

This is remarkable, because only 32% of taxpayers in this income group will pay any federal income tax at all on their 2008 income.

Taxpayers with adjusted gross incomes below \$30,000 represent almost half [46%] of the total number of taxpayers for tax year 2008.

With a small amount of public education about the [admittedly complicated] tax system, displeasure with the federal income tax among this part of the population could drop significantly.

OTHER TAXES HIT HARDER

Of course, the federal income tax is not the only tax. There are plenty of other federal taxes, not to mention state and local taxes, that have a much greater impact on individuals and families making less than \$30,000.

Virtually everyone who works pays federal payroll taxes, and federal excise taxes [gasoline tax] affect almost everyone, too. State and local taxes hit low and middle-income families more than upper-income families.

The federal income tax is progressive enough to offset some of the regressive effects of these other taxes. The end result is a tax system that is not tremendously progressive, but fairly flat.

There are many, many ways that we could improve America's tax system, including the federal income tax. The right place to start is to acknowledge that the federal income tax does not pose a crushing burden for working-class families, as many anti-tax activists would have us believe.

[The number of Oklahoma protesters was buoyed by hundreds of children - many of them from homeschooled homes].

Another Citizens for Tax Justice report finds that the share of total taxes [all federal, state and local taxes] paid by taxpayers in each income group is very similar to the share of total income received by each income group.

Rightwing radio talk fests and Oklahoma's kept media fired up the citizenry but the "victim" was not the taxpayer but the truth - low and middle income families are paying their fair share and the rich are far from over-taxed.

BOOKS

Sadly, America Repeats History, Hysteria

By Mike Nobles

IN DEFENSE OF OUR NEIGHBORS

The Walt and Milly Woodward Story

By Mary Woodward

Fenwick Publishing

152 pages, \$24.95

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. – Matthew 25:40

In reading this book I was reminded once again of the bigotry, fear and racism created by wartime hysteria that has been a constant in this country. I say constant because the shameful treatment of Japanese-Americans during World War II should have been a lesson to all citizens that our cherished rights are written on a very fragile cloth.

Yet, during the run up to the Iraq invasion in 2003 and, to a lesser extent, immediately after the Oklahoma City bombing, the rush to identify and punish those that remotely looked “foreign” was a priority of much of the citizenry of the United States.

In the rush to judgment it appears we forgot the lessons learned from World War II that wartime hysteria usually leads to an assault on the very rights we claim to cherish most about our government: freedom, democracy, human rights, justice, and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

While there is yet to be a definitive account of the oppression on American citizens resulting from our recent hysteria in both the Iraq War and Oklahoma City bombing – a subject when written that will shame many readers and be yet another stain on our values – there is adequate documentation available on our World War II actions against the least of these.

This book about the internment of Japanese-American citizens living on Bainbridge Island in Washington state, and the courageous actions of the owners of the island newspaper [circulation 1,000] will make you both angry and proud.

In October 1941, Milly and Walt Woodward bought the Bainbridge Review, a small weekly newspaper on Bainbridge Island, just west of Seattle in Puget Sound. They began journalism careers that lasted their entire lives.

Bainbridge Island had a population of some 3,000, with Japanese-Americans

Okies Harris, Hillerman

Columnist Captures N.M.’s Rich Tapestry

By Mike Nobles

TRICKSTER IN THE FRONT YARD

Still Semi-Native

By Jim Belshaw

University of New Mexico Press

210 pages, \$19.95

This is an informative, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious, well-written collection of the author’s favorite newspaper columns written for the Albuquerque Journal over the past 20 years.

I always have been drawn to newspaper stories or columns that tell the stories of individuals in a community that otherwise might go unnoticed. You know, the human-interest articles that many times turn out to be more interesting than many of the front-page items.

It always has been my opinion that not all writers make good newspaper reporters and not all reporters make good writers. However, a very few good writers and newspaper reporters come to mind. Carl Hiassen of the Miami Herald; Rick Bragg, formerly of the New York Times; and Ed Quillen of the Denver Post are part of that rare breed.

After reading this book, I believe Jim Belshaw has the makings to join such a select group. Belshaw wrote for the Albuquerque Journal for nearly three decades and readers are the richer for it.

He writes in a conversational style or tone that leaves the reader feeling he and the author were the only two persons in a friendly discussion and the author really cared what the reader thought. He loves his adopted state of New Mexico and his stories provide the reader with an intimate view of the state and its inhabitants not found in travel books or Chamber of Commerce handouts.

For example, one column introduces the reader to noted author Tony Hillerman and focuses on what they talked about over their 38-year friendship that, surprisingly enough, was not usually about writing or the fact that Hillerman “... didn’t speak like he wrote. He spoke like what he was – an Oklahoma country boy.”

See TAPESTRY Page 12

representing nearly 10%. Typical of small communities, it was close knit with everyone knowing everyone and friendships that lasted a lifetime. The Woodwards pledged their forever lot with the island and promised they would “... always strive to speak the truth, unafraid, whether it be on a national issue or something purely local.”

Little did they know that in just over a month their resolve would be put to a test that many could not pass.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor created an outcry by the citizenry that in many cases bordered on mass hysteria and set the country on a course that saw the internment of American citizens without charges or trial. [It ultimately led President Gerald Ford to issue an apology to Japanese-Americans who were denied many of the basic rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution.]

When the demand for retribution began to grow and it became evident that the forcible removal of Japanese-Americans living on Bainbridge Island was a distinct possibility, the Woodwards cautioned restraint and pointed out the loyalty of the Japanese-American citizens living on the island.


It was one of many editorials condemning hatred, bigotry and hysteria that were to be prophetic: “[T]here is the danger of a blind, wild hysterical hatred of all persons who can trace ancestry to Japan. That some of these persons happen to be American citizens, happen to be loyal to this country and happen to have no longer a binding tie with the fatherland are factors which easily could be swept aside by mob hysteria.”

They went on to point out that the Japanese-Americans had sent some of their own sons into the U.S. Army and had given every indication of loyalty to the country.

Unfortunately, mob hysteria prevailed and the Japanese-American citizens were removed by the U.S. Army from Bainbridge Island. They were given six days to evacuate.

Bainbridge Island was the first place the evacuation order was executed in the U.S. They were transferred to Manzanar Internment camp located in the Mojave


See HYSTERIA Page 12



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Hey, Teachers! With Friends Like These ...

Editor's Note: The Oklahoma Observer blog offers readers an up-to-the-minute take on the day's news. What follows are recent excerpts from our bloggers. To read blog postings in full, visit www.okobserver.net.

APRIL 15, 2009

My dear friend, and our founding editor, Frosty Troy argues that any Oklahoma teacher who votes Republican these days might just as well get up each morning and shoot themselves in both feet.

Several of my more conservative teacher friends – they've bought into the GOP-Religious Right-Values Voters claptrap – aren't amused when I share this perspective.

But today, after the House approved one of the worst bills in recent memory, SB 834, they are surely getting the message: The theocrats driving the agenda in the Republican-controlled Legislature want to destroy public education – period.

They want church-schools or home-schools that amount to religious indoctrination centers.

What's even worse about this travesty – which, if it becomes law, would put the final nail in former Republican Gov. Henry Bellmon's marvelous HB 1017 reforms – is the anti-public ed schemers suckered the state's school superintendents into embracing their divide-the-school-establishment-and-conquer-it strategy.

The superintendents ought to be ashamed of themselves but, alas, shame often is in short supply with some of these Napoleons who view their school districts as their personal fiefdoms and teachers as their serfs.

The only way to put a stop to this anti-public education crusade is for teachers, superintendents, parents

and business leaders [yes, a strong public education system is essential to business growth!] to band together and push back – hard – against those who would destroy a quintessentially egalitarian institution that helped make America great.

Kudos to the one Republican who crossed the aisle and opposed SB 834: Rep. Lisa Billy of Lindsay. And a dart to the one Democrat who cast his lot with the GOP: Rep. Ryan McMullen of Burns Flat. The bill now returns to the Senate where its passage is widely considered a *fait accompli*.

It will be a stunner if Gov. Brad Henry doesn't veto this measure, the brainchild of Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, and Rep. Tad Jones, R-Claremore – and trumpeted by the intellectually-challenged Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

[What's even more hilarious is how the anti-public ed crowd is spinning this as the "school district empowerment program."]

The Democrats have the votes to uphold the veto and protect important principles, such as class-size limits and collective bargaining. The state's teachers would be well advised to take note of who their real friends are. – **ARNOLD HAMILTON**

APRIL 14, 2009

U.S. Rep. Mary Fallin, R-OK, had no problems whatsoever giving corporate welfare to the CEOs so they could produce this robber-baron crash we are in, and still she thinks the wealthy thieves need more help with their

taxes.

Now she is talking about how sad it is that the robber-barons won't get any more tax cuts. Boo-hoo.

This woman and the rest of the Oklahoma delegation never saw a monetary gift for the wealthy that they didn't like. She didn't mind putting our grandchildren in debt to pay for wars that were waged for the benefits of the rich war industry and she didn't mind doing it for the oil people whether they created jobs or not.

I still remember all the promises she, as lieutenant governor, and then-Gov. Frank Keating gave us if we would pass right to work. Nothing panned out, except Dollar Tree and all the help for the private prison industry.

She helped create this mess by deregulating the war-mongers and the war profiteers.

Now she is running for governor. – **KAREN WEBB**

APRIL 13, 2009

Not all terrorists are trained by Al Qaeda. This should not be a startling revelation, but somehow it is an epiphany for a lot of people when they stop to think about that statement.

Of all people, we in Oklahoma should know the truth about the existence of homegrown terrorists. We have experienced the awful results of distorted minds of the likes of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols ...

Such minds do not develop in a vacuum. Their twisted view of their world did not come about without stimula-

tion. Such are developed when strange and bizarre ideas fall upon fertile territory. Sometimes these ideas may not even seem bizarre to those doing the talking that conveys them.

Does Rush Limbaugh really mean to incite actions when he says he wants Barack Obama to fail, and when he makes inflammatory allegations? Do those who claim that Obama is a foreign Muslim conspirator, and enemy of our way of life, really mean to incite hate? Do those who say that Obama is a socialist, and that he is leading this country toward a communist dictatorship really mean to encourage violent acts?

There are those who provocatively claim that Obama is a "baby killer," because he believes in a woman's right to control her own body without government interference. Some are stocking up on guns now because they believe when told that Obama is going to abolish their second amendment rights. They think they might have to use the guns against confiscation efforts. The recent killer of three policemen in Pittsburgh was such a case ...

This history suggests that we must not take lightly the intense hostility felt across America toward the bankers and financial speculators whom people see taking their jobs away, stealing their savings, and pirating their retirement accounts ...

We must be cautious about the shrillness of our rhetoric ... Certainly there are those out there at both poles who are susceptible to suggestion. – **EDWIN E. VINEYARD**

Beware The Blimp That Doesn't Blink

By Jim Hightower

I've always wondered: What was the guy who invented bagpipes really trying to make?

Well, at least that wheezing, whining invention turned out to be merely irritating, not actually dangerous. Leave it to the Dr. Strangelovian schemers at the Pentagon, however, to come up with an invention that is both irritating and truly dangerous, as well as being a galloping rip-off of us taxpayers.

It's a blimp. But not at all like the friendly "Snoopy" dirigible that MetLife deploys at various sporting events. This thing is 20 times larger and is designed to be an eye in the sky, floating 12 miles above the Earth, to provide unblinking surveillance of whatever and whomever the authorities want watched, including you and me.

CONSTANT, UNINTERRUPTED SURVEILLANCE

Unlike spy planes, the Pentagon's unmanned super-snooper can "park" anywhere in the sky and stay focused on groups or individuals for days, months or years, capturing every second of their comings, goings and doings. With its giant antenna and sophisticated, high-definition radar system, it can monitor tiny details over a vast area, linking this unrestricted flow of information to government computers that form digital dossiers on those being watched.

"It is absolutely revolutionary," gushed Werner J.A. Dahm, the Air Force scientist overseeing the project. "It is constant surveillance, uninterrupted."

How joyous.

Forgive me for not sharing the military's enthusiasm, but if you're among the potential watchees, rather than being one of the watchers, you too might find this latest piece of 007 technology a tad ominous.

DON'T WORRY ... TRUST US

Enthusiasts assure us that the blimp will only be used for good, for our protection against the bad guys of the world. It's being sold to Congress as a tool that would be invaluable in the Obama Administration's escalating war in Afghanistan. Imagine, they exclaim, if we had 24-7 surveillance of Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders throughout the huge swath of mountains on either side of the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Having the technology to do that, however, is not the same as having the right.

For example, does Pakistan – whose friendship our leaders covet – really cotton to its people being under our military's unrelenting eye? No doubt our diplomats would assure Pakistani officials that we'll only watch the evil ones – but, they'd have to have sucker wrappers around their heads to believe that.

Think about it this way: If China were the one planning to put an unblinking blimp in the sky, how enthusiastic would we be? And if we do it, my guess is that China and every other country with technological prowess and enough helium will soon be up there with us. It could get crowded.

WHO'LL BE WATCHED?

Then there's the little matter of other agencies of our government wanting to take a squint through the sky eye – at us! Homeland Security will likely find it "necessary" to focus the lens on certain groups in our country; the FBI will jump at the chance to enhance its coverage of protestors; and some Nixon-wannabe will pervert the technology to track political enemies.

Remember TIA, the Total Information Awareness program concocted early in 2002 to vacuum up vast megabytes of personal data on every American? When this Big Brother intrusion into our privacy was exposed, the public exploded in outrage, forcing Congress to kill it. TIA was created by a secretive Pentagon research unit named Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency – the very group of madcap technologists, futurists and militarists that has now spawned the Blimp That Doesn't Blink.

Freewheeling thinkers and schemers have their place, but it is dangerously stupid to let them get loose and start implementing ideas that are untethered to ethics, constitutional rights, the national interest and common sense. Yet, there they go. The Pentagon is now putting \$400 million into building a prototype of DARPA's dirigible, intending to launch a fleet of these spy ships during the next several years.

Such military industrialists as Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin are already involved, so the lobbying network for this boondoggle is being put in place before we the People [and most members of Congress] are even aware of what's coming our way.

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PUBLIC FORUM

In Search Of A More Perfect Union

By Sue Clancy

Earlier this month, I listened to the Diane Rehm show. They were discussing William Greider's book *Come Home America*. Greider's view is that we have a say, beyond casting a ballot, in the type of country we have. This "say" is done in our daily actions. I also understood him to be saying that the current economic climate and the "decline" of America's standing in the world provides the citizens an opportunity to re-define what being a successful country could mean.

I'm a professional artist and part of my job is to envision things and then bring that vision into a concrete "can be viewed by others" realm. In real life nothing is ever perfect so after I've "envisioned" the fanciest flights of imagination, my thoughts turn towards what is practical. But every practical action has its root in our thoughts, dreams, hopes and imagination.

So after the Diane Rehm show finished I sat and thought about what my vision of a successful country would be if we didn't use military power or economic strength as our measuring sticks.

ENVISIONING A SUCCESSFUL COUNTRY

My imaginary country measures its success by the number of healthy citizens and healthy-as-possible citizens. All citizens have access to affordable healthcare. Food and product safety are priorities as are walk-able communities. Each neighborhood has small shops, farmers markets or neighborhood groceries that sell locally made products. These intimate businesses that bring a personal flavor to a community would be valued, supported and encouraged by government, media and consumers far more than anonymous multi-national corporations.

In my imaginary country there's a concept of "enough." Enough which would be good enough without there being unlimited consumption.

Individuals point to dinners made, kids raised, miles walked, jokes told, friends loved and various do-it-yourself or art projects completed as indicators of "success" rather than the owning of large cars, McMansions or lots of throw-away gadgets.

Businesses also have a concept of "enough" as they point to happy customers, fewer on-the-job injuries, and no customer or employee complaints rather than huge profit margins or numbers of franchises.

CHANGING THE FOCUS

This imaginary country would be more concerned about its own citizens being treated fairly, safely and equally in their jobs and personal lives than they would be in "exporting democracy" around the world.

I imagine that one job would be enough to feed, house, clothe and educate a small family – any kind of family. A social safety net would exist so families and individuals wouldn't be left to totally fend for themselves regarding basic human rights, health-care, pension security, product safety, environmental quality, housing, jobs or even body armor should any be needed.

Education would be a lifelong endeavor that engages all generations in sharing what they're learning in practical, local ways. The older person sharing garden planting tips would be considered important and so would the young doctoral candidate lecturing on botany because both contribute to the development of individuals and the community.

The personal power of individuals and communities would be valued more



than abstract military might.

SMALL TRUMPS BIG

The day-to-day personal quality of life would add up collectively to a great nation. My imaginary country's measurement methods would count economies of a small scale as worth more than economies of large scale.

Fairness and equality would be taken seriously and be addressed in concrete ways. Even if all this means that there are more discussions, debates or town hall meetings it's OK because talking to each other becomes its own entertainment!

After such flights of imagination I turned my attention to whether any of this could become a practical reality. I already shop primarily with local mom-and-pop small businesses. I could do more of that and I can encourage my friends to join me.

I can learn about proposed healthcare reforms and then sign petitions, write letters or do artwork about it. I could focus on dinners I've made or projects I've completed rather than allow myself to stress about having or not having the traditional external "success" markers.

COUNTING SMILES, NOT PROFITS

I can be less impressed by a corporation's huge profit margin and more impressed by the numbers of smiles on the customer's faces in a small neighborhood business. I could also pay more attention to the quality of someone's ideas rather than the fabric quality of their suit.

I can walk to my local Farmer's Market this Saturday! And while I'm there I can make more of an effort to talk with the people I meet.

I think William Greider is correct; perhaps the American "decline" is not a bad thing but an opportunity to re-define the kind of country and people we want to be on a practical daily basis.

– The author is a professional artist living in Norman. Her art can be seen at Joseph Gierek Fine Art in Tulsa [www.gierek.com] or at Istvan Gallery in Oklahoma City [www.istvangallery.com]

HYSTERIA

From Page 10

Desert in California.

The book details the incarceration of the detainees and their subsequent treatment in Manzanar and later at Minidoka, a camp in southern Idaho. It also discusses the Woodwards never-ending efforts to secure aid, comfort and justice for their fellow citizens. The chapter dealing with the return home of some of the detainees is a bittersweet telling of a most shameful chapter in our history.

To read the editorials and statements by Milly and Walt Woodward in defense of the Constitution, in the face of wartime mob hysteria, is to look into the hearts of true patriots.

They argued – many times, the only voice of the press to do so – for common decency and a sense of justice for all. "Let us so live in this trying time that when it is all over loyal Americans can look loyal Americans in the eye with the knowledge that, together, they kept the Stars and Stripes flying high over the land of the brave and the home of the free."

This is a must-have book for a variety of reasons. It is a stirring, heartfelt description of two true American heroes, Milly and Walt Woodward. It is a reminder, which we apparently need, that wartime mob hysteria is a dangerous thing that denies all the lofty goals this country professes to stand for in the world community.

It will make you proud to be a citizen in a land that ultimately listened to the voices of Milly and Walt Woodward and took some small, first steps to rectify a terrible injustice inflicted on American citizens in the name of patriotism.

The story of Milly and Walt Woodward and the Bainbridge Review is exhibit No. 1 in the argument for the First Amendment.

They provided a commitment to principle that is all too rare in this world, steadfastly writing unpopular editorials in defense of the Constitution and those

who were surely considered by many as ... these least among us.

The Woodwards gave journalism a good name.

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

TAPESTRY

From Page 10

Speaking of Oklahoma, the column titled Ted and Fred introduces the reader to Ted Martinez, retired educator, and Fred Harris, former U.S. Senator from Oklahoma and 1976 presidential candidate. Twice a week the two ride their bicycles 22 miles round trip and stop at a coffee house to meet an eclectic mix of friends in an atmosphere described by Ted as "Cheers" without the beer.

Another poignant column visits with Victor Westphall, the driving force behind the Angel Fire Vietnam Veterans National Memorial, originally built to honor his son who died in Vietnam in 1968. Westphall described it as " ... a memorial to peace. It's not a war memorial" and one can feel the bittersweet memories of Westphall while he discusses the memorial with Belshaw.

The stories of Designer Dogs and Pudge and Doc will make you laugh and perhaps call up your own memories of living with dogs.

In all there are 64 columns that are a delight to read. This is an excellent book to sit down and browse the next time you want to read something well written about people and places and circumstances that are what really makes a community. The University of New Mexico Press has a knack for finding and publishing really good books and this is a perfect example of their work.

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

Reagan: The Great American Socialist

By Ravi Batra

If Democratic President Barack Obama is a “small” socialist, then Reagan was the “Great American Socialist.”

Socialism has been much in the news for some months. Recently, some GOP stalwarts charged President Obama with preaching the heresy.

John Boehner, House minority leader, characterized Obama’s stimulus package as, “one big down payment on a new American socialist experiment.”

“Socialism” is a pejorative term in American politics and needs to be carefully examined. It usually refers to increased government control over the economy, or policies that promote the redistribution of wealth.

OBAMA WILL RAISE TAXES

There is no doubt that President Obama’s economic measures, passed and proposed, will raise tax rates on the richest Americans to pay for increased government funding of health care, green energy and education.

So the new president is indeed a redistributionist, but so was Ronald Reagan, except that Obama’s plans would transfer wealth from the rich to the poor, whereas Reagan’s bills transferred wealth from the poor and the middle class to the opulent.

In fact, Obama’s measures are puny, whereas Reagan’s were massive.

REVIEW THE REAGAN RECORD

Let’s go back to the early 1980s. In 1981, Reagan signed a law that sharply reduced the income tax for the wealthiest Americans and corporations.

He asserted his program would create jobs, purge inflation and, get this, trim the budget deficit. However, following the tax cut, the deficit soared from 2.5% of GDP to over 6%, alarming financial markets, sending interest rates sky high, and culminating in the worst recession since the ‘30s.

Soon Reagan realized he needed new revenues to trim the deficit, bring down interest rates and improve his chances for re-election.

He would not rescind the income tax cut but other taxes were acceptable. In 1982 taxes were raised on gasoline and cigarettes, but the deficit hardly budged.

HE LIED ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY

In 1983, Reagan signed the biggest tax rise on payrolls, promising to create a surplus in the Social Security system, while knowing all along that the new revenue would be used to finance the deficit.

The retirement system was looted from the first day the Social Security surplus came into being because the legislation itself gave the president a free hand to spend the surplus in any way he liked.

Thus began a massive transfer of wealth from the poor and the middle class – especially the self-employed small businessman – to the wealthy. The self-employment tax jumped as much as 66%.

HE MAKES THE RICH SUPER RICH

In 1986, Reagan slashed the top tax rate further. His redistributionist obsession led to a perversity in the law. The wealthiest faced a 28% tax rate, while those with lower incomes faced a 33% rate.

In addition, the bottom rate climbed from 11% to 15%. For the first time in history, the top rate fell and the bottom rate rose simultaneously.

Even unemployment compensation was not spared. The jobless had to pay income tax on their benefits. A year later, the man who would not spare unemploy-



ment compensation from taxation called for a cut in the capital gains tax.

HE WAS A STAUNCH SOCIALIST

Thus, Reagan was a staunch socialist, totally committed to his cause of wealth redistribution towards the affluent.

How much wealth transfer has occurred through Reagan’s policies? At least \$3 trillion.

The Social Security hike generated over \$2 trillion in surplus between 1984 and 2007, and if it had been properly invested, say, in AAA corporate bonds, it could have earned another trillion by now.

At present, the fund is empty, because it has been used up to finance the federal deficits resulting from frequent cuts in income tax rates. If this is not redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich, what else is?

Thus, Reagan was the first Republican socialist – and a great one – because his wealth transfer occurred on a massive scale.

His accomplishment dwarfs even FDR’s, and if today the small businessman suffers a crippling tax burden, he must thank Reagan the redistributionist.

FDR WAS FOR THE POOR, REAGAN FOR THE RICH

However, FDR took pains to help the poor, while Reagan took pains to help the wealthiest like himself.

Reagan’s measures were similar to those that the Republicans adopted during the 1920s, which were followed by the catastrophic Depression.

More recently, such policies were mimicked by President George W. Bush and they have plunged the world into a depression as well.

Ironically, the Reagan-style socialism or wealth redistribution is about to destroy monopoly capitalism, the very system that he wanted to preserve and enrich.

Wake up America and elect leaders with a heart, not those who would tax your unemployment benefits and cut the capital gains tax.

– The author is a professor of economics at Southern Methodist University in Dallas

High Economic Anxiety: Like Rats In A Cage

By Froma Harrop

One day recently, the Dow Jones Industrial Average shot up 246 points. On CNBC, Jim Cramer punched the Sousa March button. NPR’s “Marketplace” boomed, “We’re in the Money.”

Yeah! Happy days are here again. Right? And just when the Prozac started to kick in.

Or perhaps wrong. Look at the bigger picture. The Standard & Poor’s 500-stock index has risen a swell 25% from the pits on March 9, but that still left it flattened 37% from a year ago. That the employment losses in March were “not worse than expected” was cause for optimism of the most pathetic kind. In any case, the bottom line remained dismal: Another 663,000 jobs had vanished.

March retail sales showed some bright spots – toodle-de-doo – but the bright spots were few. Or as a Wall Street Journal headline put the mixed message, “Retail Sales Slip, but Outlook Gains.”

A DIABOLICAL EXPERIMENT

We’re rats in a cage, the subject of a diabolical experiment in anxiety and uncertainty. One moment the man in the white coat shocks us with a prod. The next, a peanut-butter pellet comes flying through the bars. The objective is to learn how crazy people get when they can’t make assumptions, when they can’t plan.

Thus, they closely observe us as the economic reports cycle between good news and bad news.

For example, you worry that your company may go under and take your traditional defined-benefit pension plan with it. The good news is that the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. was created years ago to ensure that workers get their benefits [with some limitations] when their company pension fails. The bad news

is that the PBGC may itself go under. The good news is that the taxpayers would surely bail out the federal agency, as it had Fannie Mae. The bad news is, hey, I’m a taxpayer.

FORECAST: BRIGHT AND NOT SO BRIGHT

What do the so-called experts say about the near future? They say it is bright. They say it’s not bright.

Cramer insists that the tide is turning. JPMorgan Chase strategist Thomas J. Lee thinks stocks will hit a new low. White House economist Lawrence Summers expects that the economic “freefall” will soon end. Barron’s Alan Abelson predicts “a disappointed market returning to its skittish ways.”

President Obama sees “glimmers of hope.” OK, where do those scintillas reside?

Housing, we are told. Some of the most ravaged real-estate markets are showing signs of life. Sales in Gulf Coast Florida, California’s Inland Empire and the Las Vegas area rose 80% in February from the same month last year.

WHY REAL ESTATE UPTICKS

True, but. The reasons for this include several passing phenomena. First, prices had caved clear to China. [When eight of 10 homes for sale in Las Vegas are distressed properties, marked improvement is not hard to come by.] Second, the Federal Reserve has stomped mortgage rates to record lows. They won’t stay there. And third, Washington is dangling an \$8,000 tax credit before first-time homebuyers. That goes away on Dec. 1.

What happens if the people who’ve put off selling their homes suddenly rush into these wretched markets at the first sign of a scintilla? More supply and

See ANXIETY Page 16

Union Critic Says Why Unions Matter

By Seth Sandronsky

My mother took me to a big United Farm Workers rally. Until then, what I knew of large crowds came from sitting with my father at pro baseball games. That thrilled me.

By contrast, the protesters and speakers at the lively UFW event totally rocked my world. To be a part of such cohesion changed my vision of what working people could do to improve their lives.

This view of human liberation, in which those who toil daily also actively engage with others politically, motivates author Michael D. Yates, a labor economist and educator, and Monthly Review editor.

SHEDDING CRITICAL LIGHT

His *Why Unions Matter* [Monthly Review Press, February 2009] sheds critical light on the U.S. labor movement at a time of promise and peril, nationally and globally. The author's approach to organized labor in the world's most powerful nation is personal and political.

He is no armchair theorist. Yates's aim and interest is not to dazzle readers with theory. Rather, he wants to empower ordinary people to see their history as a way to change themselves and the world for the better.

To this end, the book reads in parts a bit like ethnography. That is, the author captures, in the first person, vivid snapshots of capital and workers.

This is a holistic way of thinking and writing. At one point, he is the lead researcher with the UFW. Oppressed farm workers and their allies forge first-ever contracts with growers and packers. Tragically, such forces roll back these gains over time. Yates tackles the painful lessons.

SOCIAL PROCESSES ARE KEY

What emerge from such accounts, put into the broader context of other U.S. immigrants forming unions, including the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, are the social processes by which we live and create the world around us.

More recently, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, mainly immigrants, harvest fruits and vegetables in the southern U.S. states for sub-minimum wages.

Pushed to the wall, they joined with authors, churches, colleges and unions to win a hard-fought victory over employers who do business with fast-food giant Taco Bell.

Further, Yates writes of joining the California Nurses Association, which formed the National Nurses Organizing Committee in 2004, while on an organizing campaign in Texas two years ago.

CRACKING A RIGHT TO WORK STATE

Texas is a right-to-work state, one of 20 in the U.S., where unions face steep legal barriers to growth. He gives us the inside story of how the nurses' union helped to organize union-free RNs, employing strategies and tactics to help build their consciousness and commitment.

In this way, ordinary people achieved material gains, pay and benefits. At the same time, the support for a single-payer plan of health-care coverage for all is a



case of a union advocating for a public interest policy.

Such is the working-class ideology Yates calls for today, and what organized labor needs to voice to improve U.S. society.

Regrettably, American unions have all too often after World War II failed to maintain a broad social focus, instead devoting most if not all of their energy to members.

Yates analyzes the factors and forces, external and internal, propelling this trend. Union leaders cozy with corporate elites weaken democracy for rank-and-file members at home, while supporting U.S. foreign policy, or economic and political imperialism, of African, Asian, Latin American and Middle Eastern nations.

A CRITICAL CRITIC OF UNIONS

In an example of the latter, Yates considers the causes and effects of the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Department, now disbanded.

He is a "critical critic" of U.S. unions, a theme throughout the book's eight chapters. In them, readers discover cases and contexts concerning union democracy and structures, collective bargaining, union politics, immigrant workers and race, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation, and future tasks.

There are no sacred cows here in terms of people or policies. The author, for example, argues that organized labor should have spent more money organizing non-union workers than it did [\$100 million] to elect Democratic President Barack Obama.

Yates uses data, charts and graphs sparingly. The 24 pages of Resources and Notes at the book's end provide digital and print sources for readers who seek more knowledge about unions and the labor force, past and present.

Why Unions Matter is a fine book for readers to begin or continue that journey.

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Family Planning Saves Big Bucks

By providing millions of young and low-income women access to voluntary contraceptive services, Planned Parenthood, the national family planning program, prevents 1.94 million unintended pregnancies, including almost 400,000 teen pregnancies, each year.

These pregnancies would result in 860,000 unintended births, 810,000 abortions and 270,000 miscarriages, according to a new Guttmacher Institute report.

Absent publicly funded family planning services, the U.S. abortion rate would be nearly two-thirds higher than it currently is, and nearly twice as high among poor women.

Publicly funded family planning services are highly cost-effective. More than nine in 10 women receiving them would be eligible for Medicaid-funded prenatal, delivery and postpartum care services if they became pregnant.

THE SAVINGS ARE HUGE

Avoiding the significant costs associated with these unintended births saves taxpayers \$4 for every \$1 spent on family planning.

"The national family planning program is smart government at its best," says Rachel Benson Gold, the study's lead author. "Publicly funded family planning is basic health care that empowers disadvantaged women to decide for themselves when to become pregnant and how many children to have. It reduces recourse to abortion. And it saves significant amounts of taxpayer money."

More than nine million women received publicly funded contraceptive services in 2006. Most [7.2 million] received their care from the national network of family planning centers. Another two million women received Medicaid-funded family planning care from private doctors.

A SOURCE OF HEALTH CARE

Six in 10 women who get care at a family planning center, including three out of four who are poor, consider the center to be their usual source of health care, according to the report.

"Many low-income women get their basic health care for the year during an annual visit to a family planning center," says Gold.

"The package of services they receive not only includes contraceptive counseling and the provision of a contraceptive method. It also includes pelvic and breast exams, tests for HIV and other STDs, screenings for reproductive cancers, high blood pressure and diabetes, and referrals to other health providers when necessary. This is essential, preventive health care for disadvantaged women."

Public expenditures for family planning in 2006 totaled \$1.85 billion, with 71% of those funds coming from the joint federal-state Medicaid program.

MEDICAID MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The role of Medicaid in funding family planning has risen dramatically since the 1980s. The increase was driven by efforts in 21 states to expand eligibility specifically for family planning for low-income women who otherwise would not qualify for Medicaid.

"States as varied as Texas, New York, South Carolina and Missouri have decided to undergo the cumbersome and time-consuming process to seek federal permission, known as a waiver, to expand family planning services to more women who need them," says Gold.

"It's a popular policy because it helps women while saving public dollars. It more than pays for itself."

ELIMINATE WAIVER RULE

The report recommends that Congress eliminate the waiver requirement. Instead, states should be allowed to use the same income criteria to determine eligibility for family planning under Medicaid that they use to determine eligibility for pregnancy-related care.

"Cutting through the red tape and doing away with the waiver is a crucial first step that should be a high priority for policymakers," says Gold.

"Our report recommends other policy changes to help the national family planning program maintain and increase its effectiveness," she said.

"These include increased funding for the federal Title X program, which provides critical support to the national family planning provider infrastructure. Policymakers also need to take a more comprehensive look at how Medicaid and Title X can best complement and strengthen each other."

Vatican's Perverted Sense Of Fair Play

By Bill Frogameni

What happens if a Catholic priest molests children?

Usually, he's protected by the church hierarchy. Maybe he'll eventually have his parish or diocese taken away, or be switched to another one – often after years of serial abuse. But there's a good chance he'll stay in the church.

So what happens if a Catholic priest publicly supports ordaining women? Well, then he's excommunicated on the double.

"Nearly 5,000 Catholic priests in the U.S. have sexually abused over 12,000 Catholic children, but they were not excommunicated," says Father Roy Bourgeois, who faced the latter scenario after helping celebrate what the Vatican considers to be an illegitimate ordination mass in August 2008.

VIETNAM VET AND PEACE ACTIVIST

Bourgeois, a Vietnam veteran with a Purple Heart who became a prominent peace activist, stood with the trailblazers of the female ordination movement in Lexington, KY, to make Janice Sevre-Duszynska a Catholic priest.

For thumbing his nose at one of the most sacred tenets of the conservative hierarchy – that only men are worthy of the priesthood – Bourgeois was swiftly rebuked by the Vatican in a letter two months later, telling him he had 30 days to renounce his actions or face excommunication.

After his deadline passed without a definitive word, Bourgeois said his heart wouldn't allow him to cave in to the Vatican.

"Deeper than the hurt, the sadness, there's a peace that comes from knowing I followed my conscience in addressing this great injustice," he said.

A QUESTION FOR THE POPE

Still, Bourgeois wanted to question the Pope: "Who are we as men to say that our call to the priesthood is valid, but yours as women is not?"

Given that 64% of American Catholics in a 2007 AP/Ipsos poll agreed that women should be ordained, they might ask the pope the same thing.

But the Vatican, despite parish closings across America and a 30% decline in priests between 1965 and 2000, doesn't seem ready for that question.

"The church believes that the intent of Jesus' founding of the priesthood is that it was reserved for men," explained Sister Mary Anne Walsh, spokeswoman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

CATHOLIC WOMEN ONCE WERE PRIESTS

But, speaking for the group Roman Catholic Womenpriests, Bridget Mary Meehan, herself ordained in 2006 and subsequently excommunicated, disputes that teaching.

"Jesus never ordained anyone," says Meehan. "And in the tradition, women were ordained deacons, priests and bishops for the first 1,200 years."



The Vatican's strong response to Bourgeois' action stands in stark contrast to its overwhelming failure to punish molesters.

Even a homicidal priest, Father Gerald Robinson, who was convicted in 2006 of the satanic ritualistic murder of a 71-year-old nun in an Ohio chapel, has not been excommunicated.

PEDOPHILE PRIEST IN PRISON

Robinson, to date, has spent more than two and a half years in prison and lost an appeal, but he still remains a priest, albeit one quietly retired by his bishop.

Walsh's explanation: As heinous as the crime was, the church doesn't excommunicate for murder.

The Vatican may soon have further explaining to do, this time in a U.S. courtroom. A federal appeals court ruled in late November that a lawsuit arising in Kentucky over the Vatican's negligence in dealing with sexual abuse could proceed – the first time a court that high has recognized the Holy See's potential liability in this arena.

One of the key pieces of evidence in the lawsuit? A 1962 memo, approved by Pope John XXIII, directing Catholic bishops to keep silent about sex-abuse claims.

© Ms. Magazine

Barack Obama's Cup Of Tea

By Joe Conason

If conservative leaders no longer even try to offer serious solutions to national problems, nobody should underestimate their capacity or their will to mobilize angry Americans.

Behind the April 15 "tea parties" rallying against President Barack Obama's economic program – promoted as a new phenomenon by Fox News Channel and right-wing bloggers – stands a phalanx of Republicans whose ideology is all too familiar.

At the apex of the tea-party movement, aside from such Fox revolutionaries as Rupert Murdoch, there is a well-funded organization known as FreedomWorks, headed by a former politician named Dick Armey. His past career should be instructive to any starry-eyed citizens who believe that they have at last found the true right-wing revolutionary path.

Back when the Republicans first gained control of Congress more than a decade ago, Armey, a former economics professor at a small Texas college, was hailed as the author of the Contract with America.

He led the Republicans as House Majority Leader until his retirement. Having risen to power on the strength of a "tax revolt" against President Bill Clinton's first budget, which raised rates on the wealthiest Americans to trim the enormous deficit he had inherited from the first Bush administration.

That summer, Armey warned of an economic apocalypse – and his party won the midterm election before his predictions could be proved embarrassingly wrong.

THE KINGS OF PORK

As anyone with a functioning memory should know, the Republicans under the leadership of Armey and his cronies Newt Gingrich and Tom DeLay proceeded to rack up excesses in spending and boondoggling that made the old Democratic Congressional leaders look quite stingy.

When he was asked once why he and his GOP comrades were chomping so much more federal pork than the Democrats ever did, he replied bluntly: "To the victors go the spoils."

Like so many self-styled populists of both parties in Washington, Armey packed his own golden parachute when he left Congress. At the same time that he took over the leadership of the "grassroots" group that eventually became FreedomWorks, he also joined a major corporate lobbying firm. The website of DLA Piper, one of the capital's biggest bipartisan law and lobbying outfits, boasts of Armey's

influence among his colleagues.

As it happens, he specializes in homeland security, a major growth industry with billions wasted annually on corporate boondoggles. After all, his final legislative masterwork was to chair the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, and he was the prime sponsor of the legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security. Of course, he isn't listed as a lobbyist, but instead is called a "senior policy advisor."

FAUX GRASS ROOTS MOVEMENT

As for FreedomWorks, which has claimed a national membership of some 700,000 conservative activists, its operations have long smelled of Astro-turf, or artificial grassroots.

Most of the money that funded Armey's activism in the past was provided by tobacco, pharmaceutical and banking interests – and there is no reason to think that has changed.

Nor is the ideological bent of the tea party's host in any sense new. When last heard from in 2005, Armey was busily conjuring phony grass-roots support for Social Security privatization.

That effort led to a notorious episode involving a FreedomWorks employee who showed up at the Bush White House, where she was introduced as a "single mom from Iowa" endorsing the president's private-accounts scheme.

SAME OLD RHETORIC

Buzzing beneath the furious rants of the tea-party protests, it is not hard to hear the same old right-wing rhetoric about taxes and deficits and the same old schemes to cut the taxes for the wealthiest citizens, deregulate the economy and despoil the environment.

The difference between the heyday of Armey and now is that we have suffered the results of those policies in practice and reject them. The appeal of the Republican Party and conservatism as a movement are lower than ever.

Months of furious propaganda on talk radio and Fox News have achieved nothing so far, according to nearly every survey. Barack Obama's approval ratings remain close to 66%, with most Americans trusting him and believing that the country is on the path to renewal.

This president has long benefited from ineffectual and discredited adversaries – and Armey is no exception.

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Obama Is Target

White Supremacists Step Up Recruiting

President Obama may have smashed the ultimate racial barrier but his presidency and the deepening economic crisis are creating the perfect storm for white supremacists.

Racist extremists have been energized by Obama's election, hoping to exploit an Obama backlash among whites who resent having a black man in the White House.

Neo-Nazi David Duke says Obama will be a "visual aid" for angry white Americans and will provoke a backlash among relatively mainstream whites that will "result in a dramatic increase in [the] ranks" of extremists. Many other hate group leaders agree.

BACKLASH UNDERWAY

That backlash was evident in the aftermath of the election as scores of racially charged incidents – beatings, effigy burnings, racist graffiti, threats and intimidation – were reported across the country.

"There's a real fury out there in certain quarters," said Mark Potok, director of the Intelligence Project.

White supremacist groups boasted of a post-election surge of new members as well as overwhelming traffic to their websites.

At least two hate groups – Stormfront and the Council of Conservative Citizens – said their websites crashed because of heavy traffic.

Stormfront also claimed to have gained thousands of new members immediately after Obama was elected on Nov. 4. The League of the South, a neosecessionist group, said it saw a surge in phone calls from potential members and that its web traffic increased six-fold.

IT STARTED BEFORE ELECTION

Even before the election, racial rage began to break out across the country. Effigies of Obama appeared hanging from nooses on university campuses.

Angry supporters of John McCain and Sarah Palin reportedly shouted "kill him" and "terrorist" at a campaign rally. Racist graffiti targeting Obama abounded.

Law enforcement agencies say Obama received more threats than any previous president-elect. Two suspected assassination plots have been broken up – one involving two racist skinheads in Tennessee and, just before Obama's Jan. 20 inauguration, a Wisconsin man was arrested for threatening to kill Obama in an Internet posting.

At the same time, the economic meltdown is helping to create the conditions in which racist, extremist and militia groups typically thrive, often by scapegoating minorities and by stoking fear and division among those who are harmed by events beyond their control or understanding.

HOW TO EXPLOIT HARD TIMES

Neo-Nazi Jeff Schoep may have offered the clearest vision of how the economy can be exploited.

"Historically, when times get tough in our nation, that's how movements like ours gain a foothold," the leader of the National Socialist Movement told USA Today.

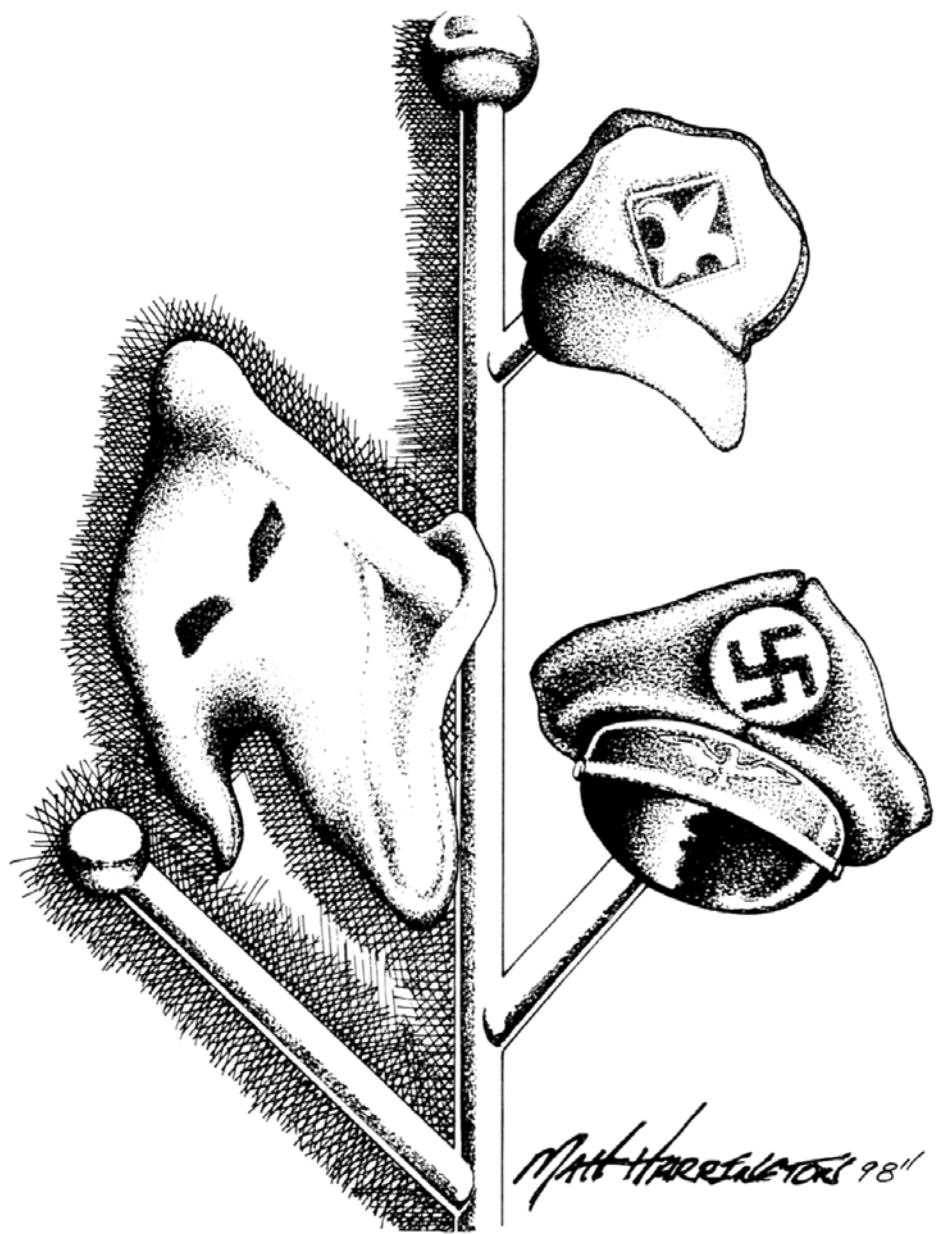
"When the economy suffers, people are looking for answers ... We are the answer for white people."

The Obama era comes after years in which white supremacists have successfully exploited the immigration debate – both providing racist propaganda that seeps into the popular culture and benefiting from the vilification of Latino immigrants.

BIGOTRY FUELED BY IMMIGRATION

Mainly as a result of the bigotry and xenophobia surrounding the immigration debate, the number of hate groups operating in the United States has risen by nearly 50% – from 602 to 888 since 2000.

Now, these groups have begun to turn their attention to Obama – distributing racist propaganda, filling Internet message boards with threats and messages of



hate, and, in some cases, taking more direct action against minorities.

Here is a sampling of racial incidents reported in the wake of Obama's election:

- Police in Riverside County, CA, said five attacks on minorities were likely related to the election and were believed to have been carried out by a local white supremacist gang.
- In Shreveport, LA, a black man wearing an Obama t-shirt was brutally beaten by a group of white men screaming "f-k Obama" and "n----r president." The attack left the man with a broken nose, broken eye socket and broken tear duct, requiring multiple surgeries.

WHITES BURN BLACK CHURCH

- In Springfield, MA, a black church was burned hours after the election was called for Obama. Authorities later arrested three white men.
- In Staten Island, NY, a black teen was bloodied and bruised by two white teens who shouted "Obama" while pummeling him with a bat and pipe.
- In Rexburg, ID, second- and third-graders on a school bus chanted "assassinate Obama."
- In Torrance, CA, swastikas and racial slurs were spray-painted on homes and cars of people who displayed Obama signs or bumper stickers.
- In Milwaukee, a poster of Obama with a bullet going through his head was discovered in a police station.
- In Maine, a sign at a convenience store invited customers to join a betting pool on when Obama would be assassinated. The sign said, "Let's hope we have a winner."

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LANGUAGE

From Page 8

wing ideas and propaganda. However, his bill is opposed by the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce, and there will likely be big advertising money spent against it as well as for it.

Either way Terrill's bill is taking up unnecessary legislative time, when there is other important business requiring attention of that body.

GOP KOOKS EASIER TO SPOT

It seems that every controlling party has its legislator kooks, whether in the Democratic or this Republican era. The Republican kooks may be a little easier to spot.

Like Terrill, they sponsor off-the-wall legislation on immigration or maybe gun-toting on college campuses.

Like state Owasso Sen. Randy Brogden, they may espouse ideas like turning down the federal stimulus money that is already at work fixing bridges and doing things we have been neglecting because of their state tax cutting.

The ruling Republican Party would be well advised to control its kooks. These nutty people give their party a bad name. Since they are now the party in power, they are the ones who must act responsibly if they are to govern in a reasonable,

restrained, and successful manner.

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

ANXIETY

From Page 13

again lower prices. That's what Ian Shepherdson, economist at High Frequency Economics, expects. He expects an additional 20% drop in the Case-Shiller home price index.

The ongoing crisis in commercial real estate debt hasn't received as much attention as housing. Nor has bad corporate debt, another shoe that many economists see teetering.

So we sit forlornly in the cage, cheered up one minute, tormented by despair the next. Uh-oh. Here comes the big man in the white coat again. Prod or pellet?

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Oklahoma Take Note

Many Non-Natives Are Dropping Out

By James Vaznis

Students not fluent in English have floundered in Boston schools since voters approved a law change six years ago requiring school districts to teach them all subjects in English rather than their native tongue.

In one of the most striking findings, a study found that the high school dropout rate nearly doubled for students still learning to speak and write in English.

The report is by the Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and the Center for Collaborative Education.

The report – considered the most comprehensive look at the law's impact on any school district in the state – paints a picture of a system ill-prepared to serve non-native English speakers, who make up about 38% of the district's 56,000 students.

DISTRICT FAILING NON-ENGLISH STUDENTS

In many cases, the district is failing to evaluate properly and subsequently identify hundreds of students for special language instruction, while also failing to provide parents with enough information to make sound decisions about program choices, according to the report, which analyzed data between 2003 and 2006.

Overall, the statistics show that the law – hailed as a quicker way to teach students English – has not helped them gain ground on their English-speaking peers, and in many cases may have left them even further behind.

Carol R. Johnson, superintendent of Boston schools, acknowledged shortcomings in the district's programs but emphasized that she is committed to improving the performance of English language learners.

THE DISTRICT WILL REVAMP TESTS

She said the district intends to revamp the way it tests students for those services, provide more comprehensive information to parents about services, and is expanding programs for those students.

The report, which included a review of standardized test scores, attendance data, and suspension rates, steered clear of the contentious issue of whether the change in law was appropriate, and instead highlighted solutions that Boston should adopt to conform with the law.

The findings could also provide insight into what is happening in other school districts across America.

The report looks specifically at languages most often spoken by them: Spanish, Chinese dialects, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, and Cape Verdean Creole.

WASTING THE POTENTIAL OF CHILDREN

"It's always a crime when the potential of any kid is wasted away because a school system didn't provide the services they should be," said Jane E. Lopez, a staff attorney with Multicultural Education, Training, and Advocacy Inc., a national pro-bilingual education group with offices in Massachusetts. "It's a huge problem and it should be an embarrassment to Boston public schools."

Voters approved the law change in fall 2002 against the backdrop of a contentious national debate over immigration; school districts had nine months to implement the dramatic change.



The ballot question ended the state's three-decade-old transitional bilingual education program, which promoted the practice of teaching English language learners subjects in their native languages while they learned to speak English fluently.

Under the new law, districts must teach all subjects in English even as students learn the language. In most cases, students are taught as a group in a separate classroom, where a teacher uses more simplified English and pictures and graphics in teaching subjects such as science and geometry.

GOAL IS TO MERGE STUDENTS

The goal is to merge students into regular education classes within a year or two. Students can still be taught academic subjects in their native languages under the new law, typically when a critical mass of students who speak that language exist and parents want the program.

But many education advocates say school districts are unaware of that provision or do not generally let parents know of this right.

In one finding, the report found that a number of parents declined to enroll their children into English language learning programs, even though Boston officials had identified their children as needing extra help.

According to the report, the high school dropout rate for students whose parents declined such services tripled over the period studied.

One parent advocate said many parents, particularly those who do not speak English, do not understand the consequences of declining services because school staff has failed to explain program offerings and the law properly.

The report follows a state review of the district's program last year that found thousands of students identified as English language learners did not receive support for the past four years, and ordered the district to develop a remedy.

Boston schools submitted their plan to the state this winter. Boston has been without a permanent director for English language learning programs for nearly a year.

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Democratic Pusillanimity Vs. GOP Stupidity

By Jim Hightower

Once again, we are faced with the question that has long bedeviled political analysts and barstool pundits everywhere: Is the pusillanimity of Democrats worse than the stupidity of Republicans?

The question arises because of a curious vote in the House of Representatives to restrict the bonus money going to those nimble-fingered financial whizzes at Wall Street firms being bailed out by you and me.

It was curious because there had already been a vote to do this in March. Back then, after we commoners learned that Merrill Lynch, AIG and others were merrily tossing million-dollar bonus checks to their top executives [even as they pleaded for Washington to rescue their sorry butts], a genuine populist furor swept across the country, sales of pitchforks spiked and Washington simply had to act.

RIGHTEOUS RHETORIC FADES QUICKLY

We will "do everything we can to get those bonuses back," promised President Barack Obama, who coolly explained that he was seething inside. Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley went further, barking that AIG's bonus-grabbers should do the honorable thing. Return the money? No, fumed the senator, they should commit hari-kari. So, last month, the House voted overwhelmingly to reclaim the bonus money by putting a near total tax on it.

Then, however, pusillanimity and stupidity settled over Washington like a blinding fog. Let's start with the Democrats.

They had put on a good show, denouncing the Wall Street bankers with righteous rhetoric, then pushing a properly populist reform through the House – but suddenly, they went wussy. It seems that lobbyists for the finance industry, which is a major funder of the party's candidates, had been working behind the scenes, applying soothing cold presses to the fevered brows of Democrats and cooing softly about the need to show restraint.

Also, such White House "Friends of the Street" as chief economic advisor Larry Summers were urging a kinder, gentler approach to executives' compensation. [Coincidentally, Larry was paid \$5 million last year to be an advisor to one of the biggest hedge funds on Wall Street and drew another \$2.7 million in speaking fees from various financial giants now getting taxpayer dollars.]

ALL THE POPULISM BOILED OUT OF IT

Next thing you know, Obama himself changed his scolding tone, urging the public not to vilify bankers. Then, Senate leaders quietly deep-sixed the House "bonus tax," and House leaders substituted the revised bill that passed in early April.

This version had all the populism boiled out of it. Rather than yanking back the underserved bonuses, the bill explicitly authorizes such payments – as long as the treasury secretary does not consider them "unreasonable or excessive." Ahhh, sighed Wall Street with a collective smile, that's more like the Democrats we love.

Enter the Republicans. They were furious at the Democrats! Was it because the Dems weaseled, essentially saying "thbttttt" to the public's sense of moral outrage? No, no, that would have been smart. Instead, House Republican leaders came up with the one and only political strategy that could make them look worse than the Democrats: They rose on their hind legs and loudly, ardently, stupidly defended the "right" of Wall Streeters to shower any excesses they want on their management elite.

They yowled that the effort to limit pay is outrageous governmental interference in the sacrosanct private sector. "Would our forefathers ever have considered giving the government a say on how much a private citizen earns, a so-called say-on-pay?" yelled Rep. Spencer Baucus of Alabama.

See ANGER Page 19

Dispelling Myths On Teacher 'Tenure'

By Diane Ravich

Editor's Note: Since February 2007, two leading figures in education, Deborah Meier and Diane Ravitch, have been debating public education – its strengths, weaknesses, improvement strategies and more – in a blog called Bridging Differences. The following is excerpted with permission from historian Ravitch's post.

Recently, an old friend who is a businessman and philanthropist sent me a copy of a speech that he gave at Channel 13's Celebration of Teaching and Learning. For many years, he and his family have very generously supported a school for gifted children in one of New York City's poorest neighborhoods.

The main conclusion of his speech was that the obstacle to educating all children well is the union, because the principal cannot hire and fire and assign teachers as he or she wants. He asked me what I thought of his ideas.

I responded that I was puzzled. The unions don't seem to cause low performance in the wealthy suburban districts that surround our city.

OTHER NATIONS HAVE NO PROBLEM

They don't seem to be a problem for the nations that regularly register high scores on international tests. If getting rid of the unions were the solution to the problem of low performance, then why, I asked him, do the southern states – where unions are weak or nonexistent – continue to perform worse than states with strong unions?

And how can we explain the strong union presence in Massachusetts, which is the nation's highest performing state on the National Assessment of Educational Progress? I suggested that low performance must be caused by something else other than teachers' unions. I have not yet received a reply, so I suppose he is thinking about it.

It actually doesn't seem to be all that hard to get rid of incompetent teachers. It appears that 40% of all those who enter teaching are gone within five years, according to research that I have seen.

In every district, to my knowledge, teachers do not gain due process rights for three years [in some places, it takes five]. During those three to five years, their supervisors have plenty of time and opportunity to evaluate them and tell them to leave teaching.

IT'S DUE PROCESS, NOT TENURE

Then, when they have passed the three- or five-year mark, they have due process rights. They cannot be terminated without cause and due process. Although that is usually referred to as tenure, it really is not tenure.

In higher education, tenure is an iron-clad guarantee of lifetime employment except for very egregious causes. Teachers do not have that. They have the right to due process. Many administrators would like to fire teachers without due process.

I can't blame teachers for wanting protection from arbitrary administrators, especially now, when there are quite a few high-profile superintendents who like to grab headlines by threatening to fire teachers.

The right to form and join a union is one of the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [Article 23]. I made several trips to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union before the end of the Cold War and met many teachers who were eager to belong to a union that would protect their interests. The state did not want unions or tolerated only faux-unions.

I read recently that membership in unions is now under 10% of the private sector workforce. Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich wrote in the Los Angeles Times not long ago that the unions helped our nation build a solid middle class.

Now, in these difficult times, we may again see a turn to unionism, and for all the predictable reasons, having to do with protection from arbitrary and capricious management to economic security to the demand to have a voice in decisions about the workplace.

PRISONS

From Page One

Democratic constituency.

GOP interest in outsourcing corrections is enhanced by the involvement of the private prison industry in the American Legislative Exchange Council, a corporate front group that claims it's bipartisan, but is overwhelmingly Republican.

• The private prisons industry has friends in high places – specifically, former state Rep. Fred Morgan, who serves as Coffee's \$140,000-a-year chief assistant.

A 2006 report by The Institute on Money in State Politics found he received \$5,250 from lobbyists representing three private prison companies during the time he served as House minority leader [1998-2002]. More recently, Morgan vacationed [at his own expense, he said] on the Mexican Riviera with two lobbyists, including one for GEO Group Inc., which operates a private prison in Lawton.

This, on the heels of Coffee's request for a cost-analysis on closing the trio of state prisons – and the president pro tem's proposal to abolish the state Board of Corrections, giving the governor authority to appoint the correction's director.

Coffee's conniption was aimed at Corrections Director Justin Jones, who estimated it would cost \$23 million to close the prisons. Coffee's team has a history of targeting agency officials who won't play the pro tem's political games.

For years, the prison industrial complex has generously sprinkled Oklahoma campaign coffers – not least because the state was one of the first to embrace private prisons.

In the 2002 and 2004 campaign cycles, the Institute report revealed, prison-industry contributions to Oklahoma political candidates totaled \$170,500, including \$88,700 to legislative candidates, \$48,250 to gubernatorial candidates and \$27,600 to political party committees.

Before 2004, Democrats controlled both houses of the state Legislature and received the majority of contributions – \$52,650 – compared to \$36,050 for Re-

publicans.

More recently, the Associated Press reported that GEO's political action committee contributed \$8,500 to a variety of Oklahoma campaign committees last summer, including \$2,000 to the state Republican Senatorial Committee.

It's not new that campaign money influences key public policy decisions. But this debate should give Oklahomans extra pause because the more the state relies on private prisons, the more likely it could be held hostage by corporations that jack up rates arbitrarily or play Oklahoma against other states needing bed space. It was only three years ago that Cornell Corrections evicted 800 state inmates from its private prison in Hinton because it negotiated a better-paying deal with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The private prison shareholders care about one thing: return on investment. Why should Oklahoma taxpayers guarantee a profit for investors, most of whom probably live in other states? Shouldn't state legislators be more concerned with giving *Oklahoma taxpayers* the most bang for *their* bucks? Couldn't Oklahoma build new facilities for less [i.e., minus the corporate profit margin]?

Legislative leaders, and private prison honchos, contend that private industry can build new prisons faster and less expensively than state government. Independent research is mixed, according to experts.

One paramount question lingers: If the MGT audit [demanded by Republicans] extolled the virtues of the state's public prison system, and recommended even more taxpayer support for it, why are legislative leaders scheming to include millions more for private prisons this year?

Watch the appropriations process closely in the Legislature's final month. It'll be an upset of cataclysmic proportions if the money isn't slipped quietly into the budget.

LAWYERS

From Page 7

The Washington Post reported that the insurance industry has long argued that huge losses from malpractice suits – now running more than \$7 billion a year – have forced it to hike malpractice premiums, which more than doubled last year in some cities and for some specialties.

But a new study by a consumer group shows that losses reported to state regulators – the figures often cited by the industry – were much larger than losses actually paid during a nine-year period.

The study by Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights, a Santa Monica, CA, advocacy group, found that the industry reported to regulators losses of \$39.6 billion but actually paid only \$26.7 billion – 31% less.

The losses were overstated in each of the nine years.

EXPLODING ANOTHER REPUBLICAN MYTH

Myth: There are too many tort lawsuits.

The National Center for State Courts turned up a different story. In 10 states civil cases [tort, contract and real property cases] were down 12%; the jury trial rate was 23% of the cases; of 96.2 million cases filed, 60% were traffic-related.

Data from the 17 states able to provide comparable tort and contract filing data for a 10-year period indicate a 5% drop in tort filings while contract filings increased by 21%.

Data from 35 states [including Oklahoma] comprising about 77% of the U.S.

population show a 4% decrease in tort filings.

Plaintiffs won 55% of civil trials in the nation's 75 most populous counties, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

CIVIL CASES DECLINE IN METRO AREAS

The number of general civil cases disposed of by trial in the nation's largest counties declined 53% from 22,451 to 11,908.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics in the U.S. Department of Justice reports tort cases in federal courts have dropped dramatically over the last 20 years, by almost 80%.

The number of tort cases resolved in U.S. district courts fell 79%. More than 3,600 tort trials were decided by a judge or jury in U.S. district courts. That number had dropped to less than 800.

The number of tort cases decided by a judge or jury as a percentage of all tort cases fell from 10% in 1970 to 2%.

More than 98% of personal injury cases were resolved by mediation, settled out of court, or handled in some non-trial disposition. Only 2% of cases required trials to be resolved.

Despite the facts contradicting Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, he said if the governor doesn't sign his tort bill, Republicans will submit a cap to a vote of the people.

RAILYARD

From Page One

commercial structures.

SLAM DUNK

We love the Thunder [formerly Seattle SuperSonics] and are glad that they came to Oklahoma City.

What we don't love is that the Thunder's owners gave Mick Cornett \$33,700 in campaign contributions: Tom Ward and wife \$18,400, Clay Bennett \$4,200, and Aubrey McClendon \$11,100 [the same contribution cited above].

So Cornett fronted a misleading campaign to raise \$121 million in sales tax and \$11 million in use tax [a sales tax on goods purchased out of state for "use" in Oklahoma]. All those millions, a little at a time, come out of our pockets daily when we buy something in Oklahoma City or pay bills requiring a sales tax – all for the benefit of millionaires who are generous campaign contributors.

During the campaign, Cornett kept saying "your sales tax won't go up." What he failed to say was that "your sales tax will soon go down 1%, but not if we can help it." So grandma now pays 1% extra for food, utilities and more because the poor are forced to pay so the rich can play.

PAY-FOR-PLAY?

Richard Dowell III enriched Cornett's campaigns by \$7,000. What a "coincidence" that on Sept. 12, 2006 Dowell Properties got a \$200,000 loan from city-administered Community Development Block Grant funds at ¾% interest – all with Cornett's blessing! Dowell is using the money to rehabilitate one of his buildings in downtown Oklahoma City. This deal is perfectly legal, but the \$7,000 in campaign contributions appears to make this a pay-to-play operation.

Same goes for the \$18,400 in campaign contributions to Cornett from Domer

and Phil Scaramucci and their wives. Domer is the founder and Phil is an executive of Balon Corp.'s manufacturing business in Oklahoma City. Cornett agreed to, and then voted for, the city to pay \$350,000 to help relocate Balon's water lines. That project [WC-0578] is finished.

PAVERS PONY UP

Interestingly, paving contractors and their associates who benefit from highways [as opposed to rail] are the largest single group of contributors to Cornett's campaigns.

These contractors pay their "dues" with small campaign contributions and get lucrative contracts, often in the million-dollar range. Although the lowest and best bidders get most of the contracts, there's ample work – now and in the future – for everyone because OKC has the second largest land area in the nation.

Below is only a sample of the pavers and associates who contributed. This group paid a total of \$25,400 for Cornett's campaigns. Contributors include Markwell Paving, Atlas Paving, Lemon Paving, Schwartz Paving, T.J. Campbell Construction/Paving, Shell Construction [Paving], Road Paving Machinery, Johnson and Associates, Cobb Engineering, Kirby-Smith Machinery, The Benham Companies, Carter & Burgess, and Love's [highway] Travel Stops.

By "following the money," it is clear to me that Cornett is deliberately blocking the future of rail transit in Oklahoma and benefiting, not only from the pavers and asphalt crowd, but from the super-rich who are currently making another bundle at taxpayer expense.

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

DEREGULATION

From Page 8

and balances, because human beings do not always make good decisions.

Moreover, wholesale change such as this is almost impossible to do well. I was involved in Chicago's major school reform efforts in the 1980s and 1990s when sweeping state laws reorganized local school governance at the school – not district – level. The new law was developed by diverse stake-holders in the schools, groups with educational expertise, and included many good components, guidelines, procedures and accountability measures. Even so, the changes were difficult, sometimes chaotic, and needed a lot of fine-tuning over the years.

BETTER TREATMENT ELSEWHERE

2] Will the last teacher leaving Oklahoma please erase the blackboard? This cartoon has been circulating among Oklahoma teachers for years.

Just by moving across the state line to Arkansas or Texas, teachers can earn \$10,000 more than in Oklahoma. Fortunately, many teachers are deeply-rooted in the state, or like myself, are transplants who come to feel that this is "home." But teachers do long to be treated like professionals in recognition and support for the complex, highly-skilled job they do.

This bill seems to be built on the myth that teachers are "the" reason that schools are good or bad. The dedication that teachers give to our children is returned with little respect, frequent criticism, and the necessity to work two jobs.

SB 834 allows districts to slash teacher salaries, already below the regional average, to the state minimum, which would likely force many excellent educators out of teaching and send new teachers out-of-state.

Is this the bill's goal?

FULL-BLOWN ASSAULT ON TEACHERS

SB 834 also attacks teachers by taking away teacher protections achieved by collective bargaining that provide safe working environments and professional working conditions. Such requirements are for the good of the students as much as the teachers.

One important educational provision that we lose in SB 834 is small class size, a landmark mandate of the people passed in the early 1990s through HB 1017. In this area, Oklahoma is a leader, and small class sizes do offer students better

ANGER

From Page 17

Apparently, no one has told the Repubs that AIG, Citigroup and others are now almost wholly owned by taxpayers, so, like any majority owner, we do indeed get a say. Also, has Spencer forgotten that only four months ago, his party was in full howl against Detroit autoworkers, demanding that government power be used to slash their pay?

The Democrats are appallingly timorous about taking a firm populist stand on the side of a riled-up public – but the Republicans? They put the "dumb" in dumbfounding.

As a result, Wall Street hucksters skate by, thumbing their noses at you and me.

© Creators Syndicate

Today's Word: Liquidity

Definition: Liquidity is when you look at your retirement funds and wet your pants!

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, APRIL 25, 2009, PAGE 19

education.

A kindergarten teacher notes the difference: "You have to remember that kindergarten is the new first grade. What used to be first grade skills are now taught in kindergarten. To learn these skills at age five, children need one-on-one attention. I can manage that in a class of 20. A class of 35 is babysitting."

These new expectations that begin in kindergarten continue through high school graduation.

Small class sizes are a feature of the most elite private schools. If they are a necessity there, they are an obligation for public schools that educate a wide range of students. They allow educators to establish the relationships upon which good teaching is based.

OKLAHOMA, A PLEASANT SURPRISE

After guiding my daughter through public education in Chicago, where her classes had 30-35 students, I was amazed and pleased to see Oklahoma's small class sizes in a state that ranks low in many measures of child and family well-being.

And as a teacher, when I have individual and small group time with my students, they can bloom in unexpected ways.

I have been involved in education over the past 30 years, though only recently as a classroom teacher. The central good thing that I have found in schools is the wonderful teachers in almost every school who work tirelessly to educate "other people's children."

Even when a school or a district is struggling, there are always some skillful teachers who have refused to give up. But because teaching is such a special art it is difficult to attract and retain enough of these talented individuals.

GUBERNATORIAL VETO URGED

What is the purpose of this bill? Is it to create better schools? No clear goals are provided. It deregulates, but provides no new structure. Evidence accumulated from around the country over the past almost 20 years on a variety of efforts tells us that it is very difficult to change a school district all at once. Most successful school improvements are small-scale, school by school, and are based on careful planning.

As of this deadline, the bill has passed the House and returned to the Senate. I urge all concerned citizens who care about public education to tell their senators to vote no, then call Gov. Henry and tell him that he must veto this foolish, naïve and destructive bill.

– The author is a teacher in an Oklahoma public school, a former college professor in the field of education, and holds a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. A native of South Carolina, she has worked in several states throughout the Midwest.

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