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Facing Our False Bravado Sooner Centennial

By Frosty Troy

"Government is instituted for the common good, for the promotion, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people and not for profit, honor or private interest of any man, family or class of men." – John Adams

When did Oklahoma become a state of reactionary politics, providing for the wealthy when a fifth of our children go to bed hungry?

When did Oklahoma voters decide it was OK to elect state legislators whose partisanship produces laws taking care of special interest groups while ignoring the public good?

When did we decide to send presidential clones to Washington – from a state that produced Carl Albert, Bob Kerr, Mike Monroney, Page Belcher and other stand-tall stalwarts?

When was it decided to balance the state budget on the backs of working people while large tax cuts abounded for the affluent?

Why do we tolerate politicians who would eliminate the income tax in favor of sales taxes? [There is no more regressive tax than the sales tax.]

When was it decided it was good government to pass \$700 million in tax cuts when tens of millions in past-due bills go unpaid?

When did we begin to mix church and state with some of the sorriest new laws in history – including funding a new "faith based" bureaucracy?

Why did we look the other way as our leaders let us fall to 47th in what we spend on a child's public school education – while tens of millions of dollars are shuffled to the rich?

When was it possible that Oklahoma would be ranked one of the 10 worst states for technology jobs while grossly underfunding our superb CareerTech system?

When was it decided that 25% of Oklahoma children K-12 would care for themselves after school without any adult supervision – while our members of Congress voted for the Bush elimination of the after school program?

Why do we complain about crime but were silent when the President took 100,000 cops off the beat?

Why have we failed to take the governor out of the parole process, leading to the fourth highest percentage

of men incarcerated, first in women? [In 1980 we had 5,000 prisoners; today it is closing in on 26,000.]

Why do we complain about the Department of Human Services while dropping to 37th in the percentage of poor babies and mothers that do not receive prenatal care?

When did we decide to accept the fact that Oklahoma is third in the percentage of divorce, in the top five in domestic abuse of women?

When will we bother to find out that Oklahoma leads the nation in the seriously mentally ill while the Legislature provides minimal help?

When did we decide that the Oklahoma County jail would be the largest mental institution in the state?

When did we decide to tolerate ranking 50th in quality of care for Medicaid services for the poor – 47th in provider reimbursement?

When did we decide to turn our backs on our prison system, disregarding the valiant service of underpaid, overworked guards in badly overcrowded, dilapidated facilities?

When did we go to sleep at the wheel leaving 600,000 of our fellow Sooners

[including 146,000 children] without health insurance and no option but using expensive emergency rooms?

When did we decide to fill the houses of worship to overflowing every weekend, but only 44.8% bothered going to the polls in '06?

When did 85% of us decide to brag to the Oklahoma Poll about our happiness when 29% of Oklahomans earn at or below the poverty rate?

When did we bother to check to see why Oklahoma is 48th in immunization of pre-school children?

When did we decide it was OK for 30% of our minority kids to drop out of school while we spend less and less to combat that problem?

Why do we shrug our fundamentalist shoulders at our rank of third in teen pregnancy? [Half our babies are born with low birth weights.]

Where is the outrage when 87,932 of our young children are abused, yet our welfare agency doesn't have enough funds to employ sufficient child welfare workers or pay them a decent wage?

When did we decide to ignore ranking 10th in women killed by a partner

at a time when a lot of cops don't take domestic abuse seriously, not even rape?

Why did it take a disastrous level of pension underfunding [more than \$11.4 billion] before the Legislature took action, then applying a non-binding Band-Aid?

When did we decide to keep in office those elected officials who refuse to address the outrageous payday loan business, charging interest as high as 300%?

When did we decide it was patriotic for a kid to reach 18 and volunteer to go to Iraq and die for his country, but it is a crime for him to drink a beer?

When did we decide to ignore the danger of smoking in any public facility, while ranking fifth highest in the number of smokers?

When did we decide to avoid the subject of obesity when the state ranks 38th [44th for children], touching off a diabetes epidemic?

Why won't a law be passed against driving while talking on a cell phone, a leading cause of auto accidents?

Why did we turn into a redneck heaven, second reddest state in the Union [behind Utah]?

When did we decide that it is OK for any Oklahoma burg to run a known speed trap, despite warnings from the Highway Patrol?

When did we decide the only TV station to staff the Capitol and legislative sessions would be OETA, the Oklahoma Education Television Authority?

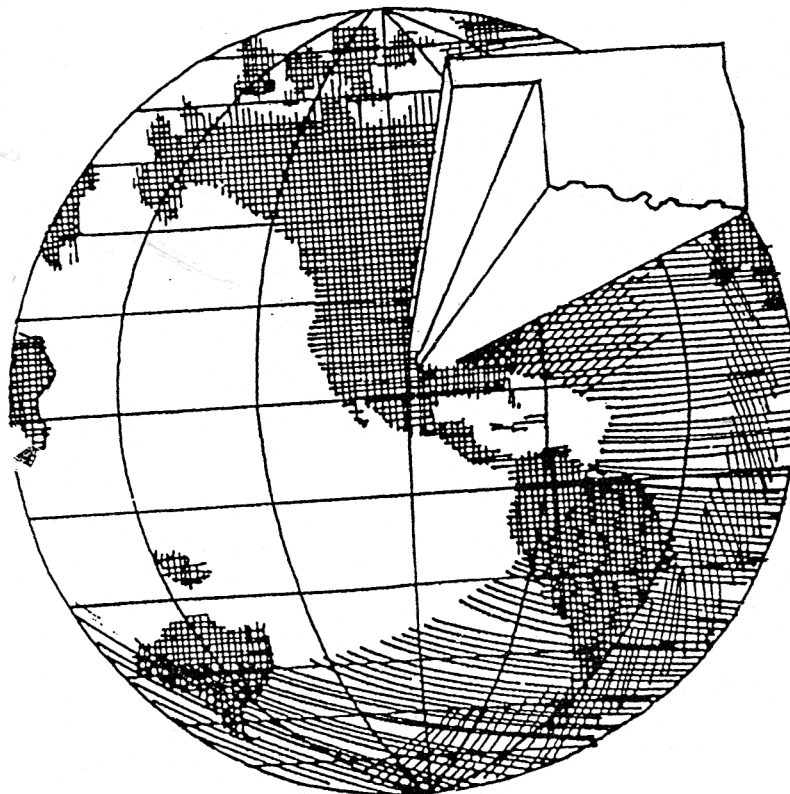
When did we decide to be ignorant on crucial issues, half not taking a daily newspaper? [Ignore the editorial page. Read the news.]

When did we decide to tolerate sorry highways – No. 1 in dangerous bridges – yet we tolerate eternal pay-as-you-go turnpikes?

Until we accept that one person can make a difference, nothing will change. It is every citizen's duty to cast informed ballots.

Until we grasp the truth about our state, we will continue our downward spiral into a fundamentalist wilderness.

If you won't think of yourself, think of those who will come after you. What legacy do you wish to leave? You decide.



Observations

Just The Facts?

State journalism schools should emphasize the competent use of statistics, especially the facts behind the story's lead.

Case in point: The media reported that Oklahoma's high school graduation rate is 70.4%, barely topping the national average of 69.9%.

Every story we saw singled out Hispanics – only 52.6% graduated. No mention was made of other ethnic or racial groups, nor were any facts cited as to why Oklahoma's rate is what it is.

The rest of the story: American Indian graduation rate 63.9%, Asian rate 79.3%, black 57% and white 75%.

An important fact left out of all the reporting was that females graduated at a 74% rate compared to males at 68.9%.

Hispanic males came in at 43.6%, Hispanic females 51.7%, black females 59.2%, black males 51.1%.

Education Week, which produces the carefully documented national graduation report annually, is careful to point out key factors behind the statistics.

Every story should have included the fact that in Oklahoma, 53% of all students are poor – eligible for free or reduced priced lunches. Compare that to the national average of 40.2%.

Instead of addressing this huge gap, the Republican-dominated Legislature [aided and abetted by too many Democrats, including the governor] preferred to cut taxes \$700 million the past three years.

Since the Keating revenue shortfall, Oklahoma has yet to restore Gov. Henry Bellmon's fabulous House Bill 1017 reforms – including mandatory small class size in elementary grades.

Education this year drew the smallest percentage of the state budget in history, despite more than half of the state's school-age children living in poverty – fifth worst in America.

Oklahoma teachers do remarkably well considering who fills the classroom seats. Our elected leaders could do a much better job, and so could the schools of journalism.

Basic Abuse

What is going on at Fort Sill? A searing issue of The Washington Spectator [May 1] documents abuse of soldiers that extends far beyond Walter Reed Hospital.

Of course when you take ordinary young men and turn them into killers, you know the training has to be stern.

There is a difference between discipline and abuse. Please read the Spectator excerpt in this issue by JoAnn Wypijewski who traveled to Lawton to check first hand on the Fort Sill abuse reports.

Fort Sill is soon to increase by thousands so we urge those who give a damn about our military to keep the heat on.

Of course you would never expect that sorry Lawton Constitution daily newspaper to print anything critical of Fort Sill. Blogs have worked overtime on this story so they can't plead ignorance.

As long as we can remember, the Lawton Constitution has been kissing up to the powers that be.

Nursing Crisis

We take no pride in the fact that we've been a lone voice for years shouting that a nursing shortage threatens Oklahoma's health care system.

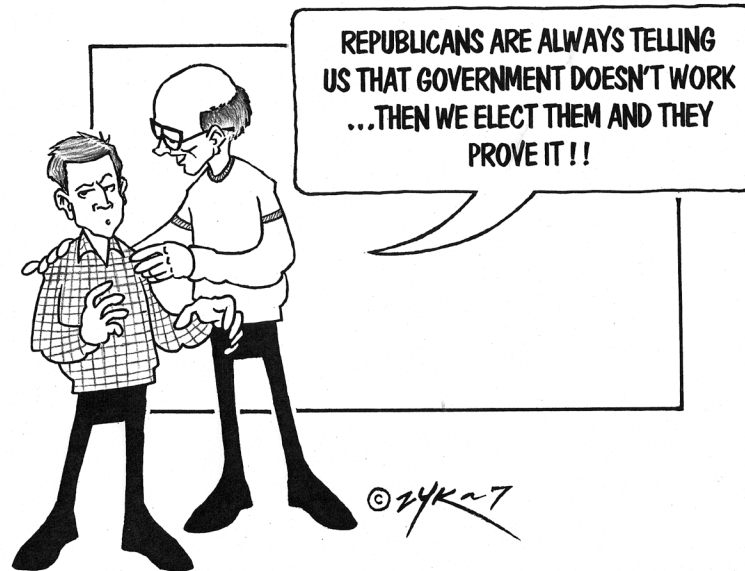
By 2010, there are expected to be around 3,000 openings for nurses in Oklahoma hospitals, according to Jane Nelson, executive director of the Oklahoma Nursing Association.

The shortage is projected at 3,135 hospital-based registered nurses by 2012.

That doesn't include nurses employed in doctors' offices, home health care, nursing homes, schools, clinics or other settings.

There are 24,000 licensed nurses in Oklahoma and 10,000 more are licensed in Oklahoma but live and work outside the state or have chosen not to work here.

Nationwide, the nursing shortage is



expected to reach 340,000 by 2020.

In 2004, Oklahoma's colleges admitted only 68% of qualified applicants into bachelor's degree nursing programs and only 43% into associate degree nursing programs, according to the Oklahoma Hospital Association.

A critical need is finding high-quality faculty.

About 37% of Oklahoma's registered nurses are 50 or older. Average age of an Oklahoma registered nurse is 46, according to the Oklahoma Hospital Association. Nurses retire, on average, at age 56.

Oklahoma ranks 46th in the nation in the number of nurses per thousand residents. The Sooner State has only 6.35 nurses per thousand residents, compared with the District of Columbia, with the highest ranking, at 16.75 nurses for every thousand residents.

If current trends continue, Oklahoma is expected to have a shortage of more than 3,000 nurses, 500 lab technicians, 400 physical therapists, 300 surgical technologists and 200 occupational therapists by 2012.

The 2007 legislative session knew the facts but applied a Band-Aid. Typical of Republicans – they preferred yet another \$74 million tax cut.

The DHS Truth

The Daily Disappointment continues to play the role of sunshine patriots – hiding in the hills until after the battle, then they come down and shoot the walking wounded.

The grossly underfunded Department of Human Services is catching hell over child death and abuse cases. But do you know the rest of the story?

DHS Director Howard Hendrick [former Republican state senator] carefully made his case for a quality budget of \$678.7 million to cover the 30 programs the agency operates.

The ruling legislative Republicans gave the agency a meager 4% hike, \$557,107,190, preferring to cut taxes again.

DHS is the state's largest agency, employing 7,810 full-time workers. That figure is only slightly higher than fiscal 2002's staffing level of 7,614 full-time workers.

With 200 more workers – 100 of whom are in the child protection division – the agency during that five-year span handled a 33% increase in food stamp cases; an 11% increase in Medicaid enrollments; a 59% increase in subsidized adoptions, and a 14% increase in foster child placements.

During that time period DHS in-

creased child support collections by 75%; handled a 34% increase in paternity determinations; oversaw a 37% increase in in-home disability services; administered a 76% increase in adult day services, and had a 36% increase in at-home services for elderly residents.

Adoption subsidies have grown markedly, from 5,798 in fiscal '02 to 8,587 in fiscal '06. Out-of-home placements – when children are removed from their homes – leaped from 13,934 just two years ago to 16,967 in fiscal '06.

During that five-year span total wages rose 13%, not even covering inflation. DHS workers – most college graduates – are pathetically underpaid. Total payroll costs have risen 25%.

The DHS brass tries to put a happy face on the crisis, fearing reprisal from one of the nastiest bunches the Capitol has ever hosted.

Politicians are lining up to study why some child abuse cases have gone awry. Will they report the truth or just jump on beleaguered state employees once again?

While Republican Speaker Lance Cargill beats his chest about "faith and family values" he ought to hang his head in shame. He piloted the ship that ran aground on Oklahoma's neediest.

He should read that portion of the Bible in which John said it is not by word but by deed. Cargill's race for governor is costing Oklahoma dearly.

KOSU's Loss

Craig Beeby has retired after 29 years with KOSU, the premier Oklahoma Public Radio station.

We won't let him slip away without thanking him for putting together the best NPR station in Oklahoma, one that is being copied now at other facilities.

KOSU has sent some of the finest young reporters to the state Capitol as full-time correspondents.

They have the national awards to prove it.

In the interest of full disclosure it should be noted that our founding editor, Democrat Frosty Troy, has been a fee-free commentator on KOSU for many years. He is opposite to Republican Neva Hill.

Balance and integrity have marked Craig's career. By not being afraid of controversy, KOSU has filled an unequaled niche in Oklahoma journalism.

Goodbye Craig and thank you!

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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 by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Three cheers for the state Supreme Court, tossing on technicality that so-called 65% Solution petition, a faked-named attack on public education funded by out-of-state enemies of public education.

Dart: To the state House Republican leadership for opening a campaign to legislate so-called merit pay in lieu of any more teacher pay raises. Oklahoma ranks 48th in teacher salaries.

An additional 1.4 million students will enroll in public schools this fall, with 69% being minorities. The National Center for Education Statistics reports 57% of Americans now have a bachelor's degree, including 20% of minorities.

Laurel: To the 2007 Legislature for helping fund important projects in conjunction with our military bases. One example: Tinker Air Force Base employs 24,000, with a \$4.7 billion impact on the state economy.

Big surprise! Among the \$100,000 donors to Speaker Lance Cargill's 100 Ideas initiative [his race for governor] is Chesapeake. You remember them - their brass helped fund the Swift Boat liars.

Dart: To Senate Co-Leader Mike Morgan, D-Stillwater, who made more than \$200,000 off a smelly no-bid bond issue for OSU housing. What should have cost at most \$6 million cost \$13 million in "fees." The FBI is checking.

Sad to report, the proposed constitutional amendments to require the governor and lieutenant governor to run as a team, and the one taking the governor out of the parole process, died in committees. Our system is ludicrous.

Laurel: To Senate Co-Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, pointing out that the 24-24 split in the state Senate lured enough [gutless] Democrats to pass virtually every single GOP initiative.

Rural Schools Education Alert! GOP Speaker Lance Cargill's 100 Ideas initiative includes one to consolidate 539 school districts into 77 districts. He's also a strong supporter of charter schools and state funding for home-schooling.

Dart: To President Bush and Veep Dick Cheney whose filthy public language has caused an FCC ruling that says if they can say it, radio and TV can't be censored. Cheney used the F word, Bush said the S word.

Teachers can't go home with the kids. A new survey shows 19% of girls and 26% of boys do three hours or less of homework a week. Average is 10 hours. It's 10 o'clock - do you know where your parents are?

Laurel: Gov. Brad Henry's administration has presided over a shrinking state payroll. In 1994 there were 40,879 state workers, today it is 36,412.

The defeat of Ben Odom by Ivan Holmes to head the Oklahoma Democratic Party was a direct result of Tulsa County Democrats who have been unhappy for a long while - especially at Gov. Brad Henry's abject failure as a party leader or fundraiser.

Dart: To legislative Republicans for creating more bureaucracy after pledging to shrink government. They have produced a Faith Based Department and the so-called Second Century Society.

Former Gov. George Nigh, the eternal teenager, turned 80. We will always remember his courageous tax hike during an oil collapse and his superb work in funding state libraries. Happy birthday, George!

Laurel: To Republicans for finally waking up. Their 61% approval rating for Bush in April now stands at 45%. The same ABC/Washington Post poll shows 45% of Republicans oppose Bush's handling of immigration.



Gov. Brad Henry sought legislation to import safe prescription drugs but he never got a legislative hearing. The GOP is owned by the drug industry, which last election cycle averaged giving \$240,000 per congressman. The drug bill is now \$240 billion a year - \$800 per person.

Dart: To those wrecking Oklahoma's pristine environment. Carbon dioxide per person now ranks Oklahoma the 12th worst state. We rank 21st in total emissions. [U.S. Department of Energy]

We're not anti-business. We're tired of the endless major league corruption in corporate America - aided and abetted by the Bush crowd. Blackstone Groups' Boss Stephen Schwarzman was paid an obscene \$400 million last year.

Laurel: To Norman Mayor Cindy Rosenthal who went hungry for a week on \$1 a day - the average for a person on food stamps. It was to promote Hunger Awareness Day. The Daily Disappointment editorial page should try it.

Tulsa County DA Tim Harris is raising the same fear we have by letting a victim's family wear picture buttons of the victim during the accused's trial. It can't help but influence the jury.

Dart: To Speaker Lance Cargill and his fellow GOP House members for shorting the bare bones Corrections Department by \$40 million, yet they are plunking down \$1 million for an "audit" of the department. Audit the Legislature.

Why hasn't Rep. David Dank, R-OKC, introduced a resolution asking Senate Co-Leader Mike Morgan to step aside since he's the subject of a corruption probe by the FBI? Dank is another phony partisan.

Laurel: To OKC Attorney Dennis Roberts for obliterating Vince Orza's asinine anti-Gov. Brad Henry column in the OKC Gazette. Orza, an OCU clone, supported the corrupt tort "reform" bill.

Dart: To the state Chamber's Matt Robison for an illiterate op-ed piece in the Daily Disappointment attacking Roy Bishop, head of the OEA. Bishop forgot more about public education than Robison will ever know.

If you haven't been to the fabulous Oklahoma City Zoo lately, go now and see the new Oklahoma Trails, featuring Oklahoma birds and animals by regions. Wow!

Laurel: To Tulsa Author Billie Letts who was among those protesting Dick Cheney in his visit to Tulsa. The cop who arrested her failed to show up in court so she went free as a bird!

George W. Bush was driving down a back road in Texas when he saw a restaurant sign: Happy Hour Special ... Lobster Tail and Beer. "Lordy," he says to himself, "my three favorite things!"

Dart: To Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove, for opposing the bill to force higher ed to come clean on kickbacks, such as secretly promoting credit cards. As a former OSU regent, he says they need the money.

Thanks to Sen. Jonathan Nichols, R-Norman, for winning passage of a \$3 fee on criminal case filings, the money to be used to investigate child abuse cases. Bravo!

Laurel: To Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, for his bill to do an interim study of the school funding formula. The eight-member bipartisan study commission is long overdue.

Of course highway funding was a priority of the 2007 Legislature. The Legislature is loaded with Roads Scholars.


Dart: To mindless critics of teachers' "high" salaries. They rank 48th in pay yet the state graduation rate is 22nd. It would take an \$8,000 raise to get them to 22nd. A five-year teacher in Texas begins at \$9,000 more than an Oklahoma teacher.

More than six million prepared meals stockpiled for victims of Hurricane Katrina spoiled before FEMA could distribute them.

Laurel: To lucky Oklahomans, ranking 47th in property tax. According to the Tax Foundation the per capita collection in 2005 was \$465.95, or 1.7% of personal income.

Oklahoma is one of 15 states failing to provide adequate legal protection for abused and neglected children, yet taxes are cut again.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I have been making observations lately [many others have probably noticed this as well] but it seems that often when I am in a hospital waiting room, in a doctor's office, or in a McDonalds where there is a television, the televisions are always set to Fox News. If I try to change the channel, it will go to grey. If I ask for a changer, they may tell me it can only be changed by the manager ... or they do not have a changer. Often the TVs are set too high to be reached for change.

I can't help but wonder if this is a Karl Rove and certain business strategies to saturate the public with Fox News bias to affect the next election. This probably was going on for the 2004 election, but I have just begun to monitor it and to ask for the privilege to change the station, and most of the time I am not allowed to change for some reason or other.

I did not know where to go with this observation and think it should be called to public attention since I believe it is a form of subtle manipulation.

Bobby Barnes
Grove

Editor, The Observer:

Most of Oklahoma's Congress members are too young to remember how Congress gave the military in Vietnam and President Johnson virtually everything they asked for. More tons of bombs were dropped by the U.S. on Vietnam than by all nations on all sides in World War II. For several years, U.S. troops in Vietnam numbered 500,000 or more.

In Vietnam, U.S. troops found a strange language, strange religion, strange customs and dress, and could not tell civilian friends from guerilla enemies. Sound familiar? Richard Nixon was elected president with a "secret plan" to end the war, essentially to bomb Vietnam flat. But more Americans were killed in Vietnam during Nixon's administration than during Johnson's and Kennedy's combined.

The Iraq catastrophe has been characterized throughout by false hopes, misinformation, and stupid mistakes with fatal consequences. Dick Cheney said before the war, "I don't know if it's going to last six days or six weeks, but I think the Iraqi people are going to throw flowers on our soldiers." Where have all the flowers gone?

War has brought ruin to Iraq, not democracy. Of Iraq's population of 26 million, 2 million have fled the country, and another 2 million are refugees inside the country. Some 600,000

Iraqis have been killed, and another 4 to 5 million have been wounded or maimed, including women and children. Nobody is counting Iraqi suffering.

Two-thirds of Americans reject the war's basic assumption, that it is making the U.S. more secure. Experts in diplomacy say it is doing the opposite: increasing resentment toward the U.S. Increasingly, American tourists are meeting hostility everywhere in the world. After 9/11, the world stood with the USA. The Iraq misadventure is making people hate us.

U.S. troops cannot be referees in a civil war where they do not understand the language, religion, or ancient history of the conflict. This Vietnam veteran and a majority of Americans are saying, "Save our troops, bring them home!"

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In the Tulsa World was an article where [U.S. Sen. Jim] Inhofe said the "troop surge" was working. "It is kind of a surprise," said the Oklahoma Republican. It is more positive than those coming from the top U.S. commander in Iraq!

And should we take Inhofe's word as true or the commander?

Actually, further on in the same edition of the World was this: "The education crisis mirrors the breakdown of nearly all public institutions across Iraq."

Perhaps Inhofe was really in the "Land of Oz!"

Gregg Scroggins
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

The Energy Bill currently under consideration by the U.S. Senate has many good provisions that would help to reduce global warming pollution by two percent per year, which will ultimately reduce total global warming pollution by 80% by 2050. The sooner we can begin to do this, the cheaper it will be and the less impact we will face from global warming. If you agree, please phone Sen. Jim Inhofe at 202.224.5754 and Sen. Tom Coburn at 202.224.4721 and ask them to:

1. Support a Renewable Energy Standard [RES] that would require at least 15% of our energy to come from renewable sources by 2020.

2. Support an Energy Efficiency Resource Standard [EERS] that would require the U.S. to lower our total electricity use by 10% by 2020.

3. Support a Corporate Average Fuel Economy standard [CAFÉ] that would



BY WASSERMAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

require an average fuel economy of at least 35 miles per gallon by 2020.

4. Support Sustainable "Next Generation" biofuel production that would increase the production of crops that are grown in a wildlife friendly manner for fuel that is far less polluting than gasoline.

5. Oppose any mandates for the production of Liquid Coal transportation fuel, which emits large amounts of global warming pollution.

We must lead the change we expect to see.

Jody Harlan
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

I've read that Bill Clinton did nothing regarding global warming or regarding outsourcing of our jobs. Remember that he was elected 15 years ago. These problems were only a fraction of what they are today.

But today, as global warming accelerates beyond anybody's wildest expectations, G. Bush hems and haws, Rush Limbaugh diminishes it, and Jerry Falwell prior to his passing called concern with global warming as the work of Satan.

Outsourcing of our jobs has similarly accelerated. Into his seventh year, G. Bush continues to reward companies doing it with tax breaks, someone in his administration said it was good for the country, and G. Bush seeks more fast track trade agreements.

Overall, with the immigration cozi-ness, it appears that G. Bush wills the American middle class to disappear.

Jim Stodola
Corinth, TX

Editor, The Observer:

I've had enough of the ravings of Karen Webb straight from the lunatic fringe. I abhor her vicious scattergun attacks on the Legislature by calling them hate mongers and supporters of rape and rapists. This is not the way to build support and consensus within the Democratic Party.

I find it appalling for Ms. Webb to attack loyal and faithful Democratic officeholders because they disagree with her one issue. There are those within our party who unfortunately have suicidal tendencies. Irresponsible and unwarranted attacks on fellow Democrats particularly our legislators are destructive and dangerous to the well being of our party.

Ms. Webb should leave our Democrats alone and save her venom for

the Republicans. Those who cannot speak well of a Democrat should not speak ill of him or her or them.

Ralph Jackson
Marlow

Editor, The Observer:

I have come to the conclusion that America was indeed blessed by having George W. Bush in the office of presidency during these trying post 9/11 times.

Think about this. Had we been led by a truly articulate and charismatic leader who embodied Bush's imperialistic, aggressive, and hegemonic ambitions, a far greater portion of our citizenry might have been sucked into supporting his/her extended and disastrous national adventures. As it is, through Bush's clumsy speech, his egotistic and exaggerated strutting, and other evidences of his not being altogether sane, most Americans have become disapproving of his disastrous plans.

Imagine where we might be today if Bush spoke with the oratorical skill and persuasion of a Churchill, FDR, or JFK and comported himself in a humble manner. We possibly would be living in an even worse Orwellian state wherein the majority of Americans were convinced of the goodness of our leaders and our government, even with their Bushian motives. They might even believe his lies and deceptions.

Maybe God did have a hand in saving America this time by giving us Mr. Bush. Maybe Providence did put Mr. Bush, the bumbler, leading the world's most powerful nation and Mr. Blair, the eloquent orator, heading the secondary and supine U.K. God save the U.S. and U.K.!

As a result of the Bush Presidency, I now have a new consideration when voting. It is, if I think we are in a critical period of history or a time of impending disaster, I will try to identify the clumsiest speaking, most inarticulate of all candidates and vote for him or her.

We then will have the best chance of Americans stepping up and challenging what is being said. We might think for ourselves and not be drawn into complacency. We might just say the emperor has no clothes. If we get a slick-speaking, articulate politician during critical times when logical thinking is vulnerable, we will have been had.

Larry Hicks
Tulsa

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Frosty's Notebook

Kicking Teachers

True to his word [for a change] Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, has launched his drive to install merit pay for public school teachers, vowing no more regular raises despite trailing the regional average.

Rep. Tad Jones, R-Claremore, chairman of the House Education Committee and no friend of public schools, will chair the "interim study."

Cargill was an opponent of public schools in his first session, ignoring Gov. Brad Henry's drive toward reaching the regional average teacher pay. Don't buy Cargill's high sounding "merit pay" ploy.

He supports public funding of homeschooling and supported a terrible unregulated charter school bill.

"A one-size-fits-all approach to teacher pay is now in the past. We should be encouraging excellence in our schools by rewarding the best teachers," Cargill said.

"Over the next few months, the House will intensively study how Oklahoma can develop a comprehensive merit-pay system for teachers that ties academic results to salary levels. The days of across-the-board pay increases for teachers are over. From now on, pay increases must be tied to results."

He cannot cite one state where merit pay has worked, especially when it is based on test scores. Goodbye raises for special education teachers and those laboring in the inner cities.

"We know there will be opposition to our efforts by the forces of the status quo, and there will be those who claim to be for merit pay while actively working against the real thing," Cargill said.

That's a backhand slap at the State School Board Association and the Oklahoma Education Association, both strong supporters of Henry's program to improve schools.

Cargill went down to the wire on the budget before grudgingly agreeing to the \$1,000 pay raise sought by Henry.

It is weighted toward veteran teachers, who were robbed by then GOP Speaker Todd Hiatt in 2005 when few got the promised \$3,000 raise. Retired teachers also were short-changed.

Cargill held out for \$600 this year, which would not dent the regional average, a fact he still fails to acknowledge, preferring a blizzard of propaganda press releases.

His is standard Republican cant across the nation as they fight for vouchers and charter schools. Bills in Congress have failed. Bush is calling for vouchers for Catholic schools this session.

Cargill said he will announce additional details about the interim study on performance-based pay for teachers within the next several weeks, with public

Hurting Poor Kids

Oklahoma's children spend 20% of their waking hours in school. How are they spending the other 80%?

One out of four children in Oklahoma [K-12] care for themselves after school without any adult supervision.

It is estimated that only 6% of Oklahoma's children and youth participate in an after school program.

Lack of adult supervision for children and youth is linked to increased likelihood of accidents and injuries, lower social competence, lower GPAs and test scores, increased use of the television and greater amounts of delinquency and experimentation with alcohol, tobacco, drugs and sexual activity.

The After School Alliance reports that eight out of 10 U.S. voters, across party lines, agree that after school programs are an absolute necessity.

Eighty-five percent of chiefs of police, sheriffs and prosecutors in the U.S. said that providing quality after school programs will significantly reduce youth crime and violence.

Despite widespread support, the Bush budget zero funded after school programs.

Over 71% favor after school programs for reducing youth crime and violence over hiring more officers [14.9%], prosecuting more juveniles as adults [12%], and installing more metal detectors at schools [2.3%].

A research study of a major after school program revealed that every \$1 invested in the program produced \$3 worth of benefits to youth and the general public.

This figure does not include the added savings from a six-fold drop in crime by boys in the program.

A recent report determined that after school programs are a good investment. The study indicated that the return to taxpayers ranged from \$2 to \$4 for every dollar spent on after school programs in the state.

After school programs are proven to increase physical activity, reduce risk behaviors and cut crime.

The Oklahoma Fit Kids Coalition estimates that nearly 40% of Oklahoma's children are overweight or obese. The Harvard Family Research Project has shown that after school programs increase levels of physical activity in participants.

Studies show that violent juvenile crime and other risk behaviors like smoking, drinking, doing drugs and sexual activities are more likely to occur between 3 and 6 p.m.

Youth who are unsupervised during after school hours are 37% more likely to become teen parents.



hearings to take place later this summer.

Hearings, he said, will include lawmakers and national experts. Such as the U.S. Chamber, brought here by Republican legislators to issue a bogus report card on Oklahoma public education. No public school representative was permitted to speak – not even the State Superintendent.

"Our state is lucky to have hardworking teachers, and the best teachers deserve better pay. It's just that simple," said Jones, who didn't cite one teacher poll to back that absurd statement.

Neither Cargill nor Jones acknowledged that Oklahoma already increases pay for advanced degrees and academic achievement.

Cargill pointed to Jones' experience as a legislative leader on educational issues, noting that Jones led the way this year on educational reforms such as expanded charter school opportunities in Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Wrong! The charter school bill Jones supported was a disaster. It was rewritten to knock out any college or any city of any size opening unregulated charter schools.

Cargill said he expects the interim study to develop specific recommendations that can be implemented. Guess what they will be and guess who will attempt to gut public schools?

Oklahoma's Youth Risk Behavior Survey [YRBS] indicates that Oklahoma youth engage in several risk-taking behaviors at higher numbers than the national average.

Children and youth who regularly attend quality after school programs have better grades and conduct in school, more academic and enrichment opportunities, better peer relations and emotional adjustment and lower incidence of drug-use, violence and pregnancy.

Research on after school programs reveals that participants show improvements in standardized test performance and homework completion and quality.

There is also a link between after school programs and a reduction in grade retention.

After school programs help improve employee productivity, reduce absenteeism and support working parents.

Polling shows that 87% of working mothers said the hours after school are when they are most concerned about their children's safety.

Parental stress has been shown to contribute to lower productivity, high turnover and absenteeism.

One study showed that after school programs helped parents balance work and family life: 60% of parents said they missed less work and 59% said after school programs supported them in keeping their job.

One study estimated the costs to business of parents' stress related to after school issues to be anywhere from \$496 to \$1,984 per employee, per year, depending on an employee's salary.



See an opinion with which you disagree? See an error that we missed? Tell us what's on your mind. The Observer is a journal of free voices, a public forum for ideas.

Republican Backfire

Oklahoma's Chamber Report Card Is Bogus

By Frosty Troy

"... Curious and malevolent." That's how Gerald Bracey, research professor, author and one of education's foremost authorities, responded to the ultra-rightwing U.S. Chamber of Commerce's "report card" on America's public schools.

Bracey dismembered the "research" in the May issue of Kappan Magazine. The so-called report card, Leaders and Laggards, was hyped in Oklahoma by the far right, from GOP Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson to the reactionary Daily Disappointment.

Main local role was played by the equally far right State Chamber.

Incredibly, the forum summary was delivered by Republican apologist Burns Hargis, half of the Beavis and Butthead show on OKC's KFOR-TV.

The Chamber and the Center for American Progress [CAP] teamed up to distort the truth. The Chamber has long been an enemy of public education, constantly calling for vouchers to combat "teachers unions."

"Suffice it to say the report relies almost exclusively on discredited research, researchers and misleading data," Bracey wrote. "The first words of the highlighted text in the report are: 'The measures of our shortcomings are stark indeed; most 4th and 8th graders are not proficient in either reading or mathematics.'"

NO COUNTRY'S READERS ARE PROFICIENT

This is true. But it is also true that not one country in the entire world has a majority of its students proficient in reading. Oh, OK, Finland didn't take part in the most recent PIRLS [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study], so we don't know that for sure.

Sweden did take the exam, and its results look like those of the U.S.

Of course, Swedish kids don't take our own National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP]. Sweden scored overall 261, America scored 243.

The U.S. finished ninth, with just three countries having significantly higher scores. What percentage of Swedish kids would be proficient if they took the NAEP reading test? About 33%.

Only Singapore would have a majority of students proficient in science – and then, at 51%, just barely. A handful of nations would have a majority proficient in mathematics.

WHY ARE SOME OF OUR KIDS FAILING?

What the Chamber doesn't tell Americans is that this country is the worst place in the industrial world to be if you're a kid. Of 21 developed nations ranked by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center, the United Kingdom was the worst. The U.S. was 20th.

Holmes Tests Formula To Rebuild Democrats

By Arnold Hamilton

Former college professor Ivan Holmes views his chairmanship of the Oklahoma Democratic Party as a two-year experiment in a real-world laboratory.

He wants to see if he can successfully apply the principles of grass-roots politics – which he credits for his recent intra-party victory and for Lloyd Fields' upset win last year in the state Labor Commissioner race – to the beleaguered state party.

"I don't know if I can do what I campaigned to do here, but I'm going to try," said Holmes, who upset Norman attorney Ben Odom at last month's state party convention to win the chairmanship.

"I don't know that a lot of Democrats think the grass roots is all that important anymore. I'm doing it as an experiment. I think it is. I think the fact that Lloyd won and that I won shows that it's stronger than people think it is. But I don't know. I'm going to find out, I guess, as I get into this job."

NOT TOO BAD FOR A RED STATE

Holmes, a wiry, grey-haired 69-year-old, takes over at a time when Democrats are in better shape than in many Red States.

Next door in Texas, for example, Republicans hold every statewide office and control both legislative houses. In Oklahoma, Democrats control all but two statewide offices – both Corporation Commission seats – and cling to a 24-24 tie in the state Senate.

Even so, the state has trended Republican for several decades, after more than half a century of Democratic domination.

About 10 years ago, "the Republican Party was where we are [now] ... and they came up with a plan," said Holmes, who directed Fields' labor commissioner win. "We just sat there and we didn't have a plan. We let them not only catch us, but bypass us. And we've sat here and done nothing, basically."

HOLMES' TASK: FINANCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL

Holmes' task is to not only stem the GOP tide, but also to rebuild the Democratic Party's finances and infrastructure.

His predecessor, Lisa Pryor, inherited a \$550,000 debt. It took almost two years, but she erased about 90% of it. When Holmes took over, he said, the party owed about \$75,000. Hard as it may be to imagine, money may be the least of his problems.

Many of the state's 77 counties, he said, have little or no party structure in place. Three-fourths, for example, have no Young Democrats' groups organized.



"Given the great din whenever American students apparently don't live up to their international peers in comparisons of reading, math, and science test scores, you'd think the media and politicians would be raising hell about the terrible state of American children in other realms," Bracey wrote.

"Few media outlets even mentioned the story at all, and many that did used a short AP wire story."

UNICEF ranked the nations on six dimensions: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behavior and risks, and subjective well-being. Each dimension was composed of several sub-dimensions.

USA HAS HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF POOR KIDS

Among 25 nations, the U.S. was dead last in relative poverty, 24th in infant mortality, and 22nd for low birth weight rate.

It seems clear that the public schools are overachievers. Given the low estate of American children on other dimensions of well-being, that seems to be the only possible conclusion.

Ironically, our highest rank was 12th, for "educational well-being," a dimen-

See BOGUS Page 8

Even a traditional Democratic stronghold, McIntosh County, has no county chairperson, vice-chair or secretary.

"The thing that scares me the most, we just don't have anybody under 35 active in the Democratic Party in this state," said Holmes. "It's not there. If we don't change that, then what's the future of this party?"

HOLMES' GRASS-ROOTS STRATEGY

Holmes said he believes he can build a strong, grass-roots network that re-engages older Democrats, plugs in young people and energizes the politically disconnected in an era when competition for free time is more fierce than ever.

"I don't think you can do it sitting here on this phone," he said during a lengthy interview at the state party headquarters, north of the state Capitol. "You've got to go out there face-to-face. You've got to look at them. You've got to talk to them. You've got to give them a plan."

His plan includes:

- Even before he was elected chairman, Holmes already was asking Democrats to help the party financially. By mid-June, 300 Democrats already had pledged to contribute \$25 a month to underwrite the party's operations. He hopes to reach a goal of 1,000 such givers by September.

"That's one meal and one movie a month," he said. "Do you care enough about the Democratic Party for the cost of a meal and a night out?"

"What I'm doing is I'm going back to the grass roots and saying, 'You people put me here, you want me to try to rebuild this party from the bottom up, you're going to have to help me.'"

CHANGES AT STATE PARTY HEADQUARTERS

- He's working to re-arrange the state headquarters to provide space, computers and telephones for such groups as seniors and veterans working to identify, engage and turnout Democratic loyalists.

"I've got people coming in volunteering like crazy because it's open and they're encouraged to do it," he said. "I'm going to open this place up."

- He's reaching out to the party's elected officials, constituency groups and their political organizations – including the House and Senate PACs – in an attempt to develop a coordinated strategy for recruiting candidates, raising and spending money and turning out voters.

"I call it the Big Tent with six different groups going six different directions ...

See OKLAHOMA DEMOCRATS Page 11

Army As Drug Pusher

Fort Sill Basic Is Abusing Trainees

By JoAnn Wypijewski

The truth is, a [military] system dedicated to transforming psychologically healthy people into people capable of performing what in any other setting is considered a pathological act, can't help behaving badly – not all the time or in all of its realms, not monolithically so that everyone associated with it is scathed.

But inevitably the ends deform the means, and inevitably someone pays.

No one is talking about it, but what happened at Walter Reed to soldiers injured in war is not shocking at all if one ponders what happens at Army posts to soldiers injured in basic training.

Basic training is one of those regimens of cruelty that people have come to accept as normal. The Army has officially eliminated some of its most abusive practices, along with its theory of “breaking them down to build them up,” the classic humiliation of recruits by a drill sergeant, designed to make them into soldiers capable of acting as a unit, following orders and killing.

This reshaping remains essential; it is simply meant to be accomplished with more respect now.

WEAKNESS IS TO BE DESPISED

In all events, weakness is to be despised, which means that the 15% to 37% of men and the 38% to 67% of women who sustain at least one injury due to the rigors of basic training at Fort Sill, Fort Knox, Fort Jackson, Fort Leonard Wood or Fort Benning are in trouble.

A year ago I visited Fort Sill, where the son of a friend had suffered stress fractures during basic training and was then in the post's Physical Training and Rehabilitation Program.

PTRP is where the Army, desperate for bodies in a time of war, puts broken enlistees whom it is committed neither to curing nor to releasing, nor even to respecting as soldiers and human beings.

Basic training takes nine weeks; PTRP can warehouse soldiers for months, in anticipation of the time they manage to recuperate, pass the grueling PT [physical training] test and go on to battle readiness; or fail the test, try again, stumble through the bureaucratic labyrinth until the point at which they are chaptered out or medically discharged.

TRAINEES ARE LOWER LIFE FORMS

As trainees, all have yet to be granted “permanent party” status in the Army. In the military hierarchy, this makes them lower life-forms, which is how they were being treated at Fort Sill.

It was Family Weekend when I visited, and the PTRP command was on its toes because for weeks my friend, Pat deVarennes, had been writing a blog exposing the routine abuses of injured soldiers there.

As a result of her persistence, the Army had initiated an investigation into the actions of a drill sergeant who had kicked a soldier in his bad knee, sending him to the floor screaming, and who had punished and terrorized the soldiers in numerous other ways.

That weekend these men, on crutches and painkillers, wearing casts or moving gingerly, were not being called “fakers,” “lady men,” “shitsacks,” “malingerers” – the names that, at other times, were regularly hurled at them.

THE COMMAND MAKES PROMISES

The command met with parents and wives and told them their loved ones would be getting individualized medical attention, something many had not had



for months, and reassured them that the soldiers' well-being was their chief concern.

A week later, on March 19, 2006, one of those soldiers, Pfc. Matthew Scarano, 21, was found dead in his bunk. He had been in the program for more than a year with a shoulder injury and excruciating pain. It was unlikely he would ever be fit for battle, but he could not get out.

Shortly before he died he wrote to deVarennes: “I liken being here to being incarcerated. And it often helped during the bleaker points in PTRP history to think of it as such: I'm far from being any kind of expert on the subject, but perhaps it was a psychological self-defense mechanism to try to perceive what was going on as being punitive in nature.”

HIS SHOULDER GOT WORSE AND SO DID HE

Over the months of Scarano's confinement to the program, his shoulder got worse, and so did he.

“The Army has me on Ambien, seroquel, tylox and oxycontin. I also get trazedone to take the edge off,” he wrote his family.

At the time of death he was on Fentanyl, described in medical literature as an analgesic patch 80 times more potent than morphine.

The Army said an overdose had killed him, and then, although his injured comrades said that dispensing drugs was as strictly controlled as every other aspect of life in PTRP, it essentially blamed the dead man as a dooper and the others as slackers for not reporting his drug problem.

In fact, some had reported it, and nothing happened. His condition, moreover, was hardly a secret to the command, since often he was so zoned out he could barely stand in formation.

ANOTHER DIED IN THE SAME BARRACKS

After Scarano's death, the Army initiated an investigation and issued policy changes.

It had done something similar years earlier when another PTRP inmate, Pvt. Jason Poirier, 22, died in the same Fort Sill barracks from acute methadone intoxication.

It's doubtful that the adjustments since Scarano's death will do any more than those after Poirier's to alter fundamentally the treatment of injured soldiers.

Immediately after Scarano's death I published a story in CounterPunch detailing the abuses at Fort Sill and sent it to every mainstream journalist I knew urg-

See FORT SILL Page 9

Deluged Oklahoma Fixing 1,300 Dams

By Clay Pope

Will Rogers once said, “If you don't like the weather in Oklahoma just wait a minute.” Never has this been truer in Oklahoma than this spring. In less than four months we have transitioned from the driest year in Oklahoma history to record levels of rainfall concentrated in areas historically prone to flooding.

With all this rain, however, we haven't seen massive flash flooding in some of the wettest parts of our state.

Why?

Because Oklahoma has over 2,000 flood control dams protecting life and property throughout our state. Since the 1940s these “silent sentinels” have held back spring deluges like those we are witnessing this month and greatly reduced the incidents of flash flooding.

It is estimated that each year these structures save the state of Oklahoma roughly \$71 million in damage that does not occur because the dams are in place.

DAMS PAST THEIR DESIGN AGE

However, like other pieces of infrastructure such as roads and bridges, these dams are aging. In the next 10 years over 1,300 of these structures will be past their design life and in need of repair and rehabilitation.

Currently nearly 200 of these dams are classified as high hazard and must be upgraded to insure the protection of homes downstream.

In addition, several of these dams serve as municipal water supplies while others can be expanded to provide additional water supplies for our cities and towns when they are rehabilitated, thereby helping reduce the affects of the next

drought.

It is critical that we begin the work as soon as possible to rehabilitate these aging dams. Every day we put this work off is another day that we get closer to having one of these structures fail.

No flood control structure built by the USDA in the state of Oklahoma has ever failed. That's a great record and it's one we hope to maintain, but it takes money to do this.

STATE COMES UP WITH VITAL FUNDING

This year the Legislature and the governor agreed to give the Oklahoma Conservation Commission an additional \$6.5 million to match over \$13 million in federal dollars to continue the rehabilitation of these dams.

This is an outstanding commitment on the part of the state government to this necessary work. Unfortunately this will only provide enough money for 18 to 20 dams.

This is a significant appropriation and our state elected officials are to be praised for this commitment to public safety, but much more must be done.

Oklahoma has more flood control dams than any other state in the Union and they have served us well during both droughts and deluge.

If we want to keep this protection and guard against both floods and water scarcity, we need to invest in dam rehabilitation. Let's make sure these “silent sentinels” do their job for another 50 years or more.

– The author is executive director, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

The Significance Of Roth's Appointment

By James Nimmo

Oklahoma celebrates its centennial this year and one would think that with 93% of the state's history having occurred in the 20th Century there wouldn't be much in the way of frontier left to discover in the 21st.

However, Oklahoma is full of surprises both on the regressive and progressive sides of the historical coin.

Here's one of those progressive surprises.

In mid-May Gov. Brad Henry appointed Oklahoma County Commissioner Jim Roth to fill a vacancy on the state's Corporation Commission.

This is a very important position in Oklahoma for both the citizens and the corporations doing business in the state such as utilities, oil and gas companies, and transportation.

ROTH RAZOR-SHARP, AFFABLE

Roth is a remarkable man in his mid-thirties with a razor sharp mind, an affable personality, and a happy home-life with his partner of seven years, Worth Ross.

Just how remarkable is Roth's appointment?

It was made by a very conservative Democratic governor who should probably be registered as an Independent such is his bi-partisan style of dealing with the state Legislature.

It remains to be seen how the rural voters in Oklahoma will view an openly gay man running for statewide office.

Roth often says that his family goes beyond the biological and that officehold-

Mental Health To Tighten Its Security

State mental health officials are urged to increase oversight of individuals in their custody.

State Rep. Chuck Hoskin, D-Vinita, said the recent escape of a violent individual held by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services illustrates the need for better security efforts.

"I'm relieved this individual was captured, but my concern goes beyond this one incident," said Hoskin. "The safety and security of the people in my district is of the utmost importance to me."

Randy Thweatt, a violent felon, escaped state custody on May 23 when he simply walked away from a lake outing sponsored by the Oklahoma Forensic Center. At the time, Thweatt was being held at the center for a mental evaluation.

ESCAPEE HAD SERIOUS CRIMINAL HISTORY

According to a story in the Oologah Lake Leader, Thweatt has a two-state felony record including assault and battery with a deadly weapon and has threatened to kill law officers, jailers and friends.

After Thweatt's escape, officials at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services notified only the McCurtain County sheriff's office in Idabel where Thweatt had previously resided.

Officials in Rogers and Craig counties were not notified for nearly two weeks after his escape in that area.

Thweatt was captured near Catoosa by an Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper

BOGUS

From Page 6

sion whose sub-scales consist of test scores, educational attainment, and the transition to work. The next highest rank for the U.S. was 17th in material well-being.

The U.S. has the highest percentage of children living with stepparents and in single-parent families. It ranks 22nd in the percentage of students who eat the main meal of the day with their parents several times a week - 66%.

KIDS WELL OFF IN THE NETHERLANDS

The child well-being rankings look a lot like those from TIMSS [Third International Mathematics and Science Study] and PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment], at least at the top levels.

"If you're a kid, you want to be in the Netherlands, and if you can't arrange that, try to find a place in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Switzerland, or Norway," Bracey wrote.

Another report ranks the states within the U.S. on overall child well-being. If you look at the top 10 states and the bottom 10 states, you might well think you were looking at NAEP state-level rankings. These rankings appear in *Homeland Insecurity ... American Children at Risk* from Michael Petit's Every Child Matters Education Fund.

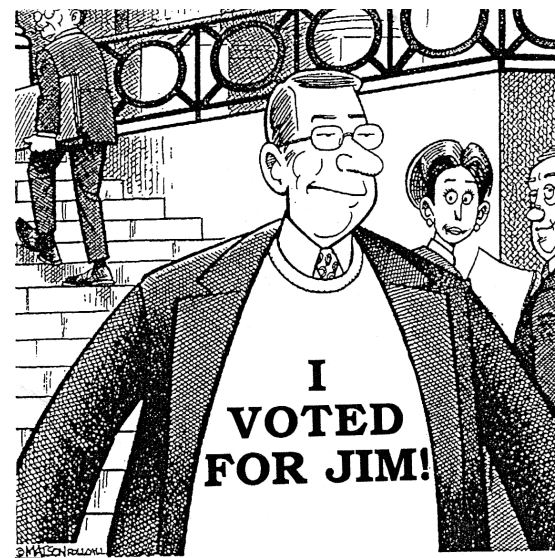
This report provides some detail that is missing from UNICEF's more general treatment.

For instance, U.S. infant mortality is 20% higher than Canada's and 100% higher than Japan's. Canadians live about 1,000 days longer than Americans, and the Japanese almost 2,000 more days.

The U.S. birthrate for females aged 15 to 19 is 49 per 1,000, double that of the next highest country, the U.K., at 24 per 1,000. The rate for Japan is four per 1,000.

CHECK OUT THE FORDHAM GRADES

"While looking at the [Chamber] tables in this report, I could not help but



ers should be held accountable by the voters for how well the job is done, not by who they love.

ROTH RE-ELECTED IN A LANDSLIDE

The voters who elected Roth to his first term as county commissioner re-hired him with a 65% majority for a second term.

The 2008 election will be important for Roth as he will be required to run a statewide campaign for election for a two-year term and again in 2010 for a six-year term.

Roth and his campaign workers will need to be full of the pioneering spirit of the Sooners as they get the rest of Oklahoma acquainted with the future - a future where, to paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King, officeholders are judged on the quality of their character coupled with their job effectiveness, and not who they love.

The flat earth view of many in Oklahoma will be made all the rounder with Roth in office.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

just two days after local officials were finally notified.

Hoskin said state officials need to review and revise the policies allowing individuals held at the Oklahoma Forensic Center to go on loosely supervised trips.

"I want to know how the agency screens individuals before allowing them to go on recreational outings. Frankly, I don't believe any individual with a history of violence should be allowed on one of these outings," Hoskin said.

"We also need to improve the process for notifying law enforcement and improve the supervision of individuals on these recreational outings."

A REVIEW OF POLICY UNDERWAY

He said state officials have indicated that a review of those policies is already in progress.

"After the story of the escape was published, Commissioner Terri White contacted me and assured me she was taking steps to remedy the situation and prevent similar occurrences," Hoskin said.

"She also contacted me Tuesday evening, immediately after the capture, and stressed her commitment to follow up on my concerns."

Hoskin has also discussed his concerns with William Burkett, executive director of the Oklahoma Forensics Center in Vinita.

"He has assured me that there will be no more recreational outings until these issues have been resolved," Hoskin said. "I'm very encouraged by Commissioner White and Director Burkett's very positive and quick response to my concerns."

notice the contradiction between them and the grades awarded states by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in its State of State Standards, 2006."

Fordham gave Maine a D-, Vermont a D, and New Hampshire a D-. On the other hand, Mississippi got a D+, Louisiana a C+, and Texas a C-.

The first three states are invariably among the 10 best in a variety of categories - including crime rate, incarceration rate, percentage of uninsured children, infant mortality rate, child welfare spending, and child poverty.

The Fordham report calls for an investment in children of \$500 billion.

No doubt this recommendation comes from the report's noting that the federal government spends eight times as much money per person on people over 65 as it does on people under 18.

"Alas, USA Today reported that federal spending on old folks is still rising, while spending for kids is declining. In 1960, kids received 20% of domestic spending and tax breaks. Today, they receive only 15.4%. If the trend continues, it will be 13% by 2017," he wrote.

SUPERINTENDENT BLASTS THE REPORT

State Superintendent for Public Instruction Sandy Garrett said the Chamber report is bogus. Neither she, nor any public education supporter or authority, was invited to attend Wilcoxson's "public" forum.

Given the sorry status of children in Oklahoma - among America's poorest - public educators do a remarkable job against fierce odds.

Today Oklahoma ranks 47th in what it spends on a student's education.

Naturally, nobody mentioned that at the "public" forum nor did the chronically uninformed editorial writer for the Disappointment.

Sad to say, the newly controlling legislative Republicans saw to it that public education received the lowest percentage of the state budget in history.

Homeland Insecurity is available at www.everychildmatters.org. UNICEF available at www.unicef.org.

Is Coburn Afraid Of Rachel Carson?

By Carl Pope

For the centennial of *Silent Spring* author Rachel Carson's birth in May, members of Congress from her home states of Maryland and Pennsylvania introduced a resolution honoring her birth and another to name a post office in Pennsylvania after her.

Republican Sen. Tom Coburn, the clown prince of Congress, promptly put a "hold" on the bills to block them from being enacted. Why? He thought Rachel Carson's opposition to DDT was "junk science."

Coburn is a physician, but one who reads medical data very selectively.

My one encounter with him occurred during the battle over setting new health standards regarding smog and soot levels.

He was on the opposite side of a League of Women Voters debate on the issue. One of my co-panelists was a woman whose son had asthma. On smoggy days, she regularly got calls from her child's school and had to take him to the emergency room.

HE SHOWED HIS IGNORANCE ONCE AGAIN

So when Coburn leaned over and said, "Will you come into my office and let me show you the scientific studies proving that smog has nothing to do with your son's asthma?" she was utterly unintimidated.

She fired back: "I don't have time to come into your office because I may need to take my son to the hospital."

Even the far right Wall Street Journal, in a recent attack on the DDT ban, pointed out that Carson had called for careful use of DDT in fighting malaria – not a ban.

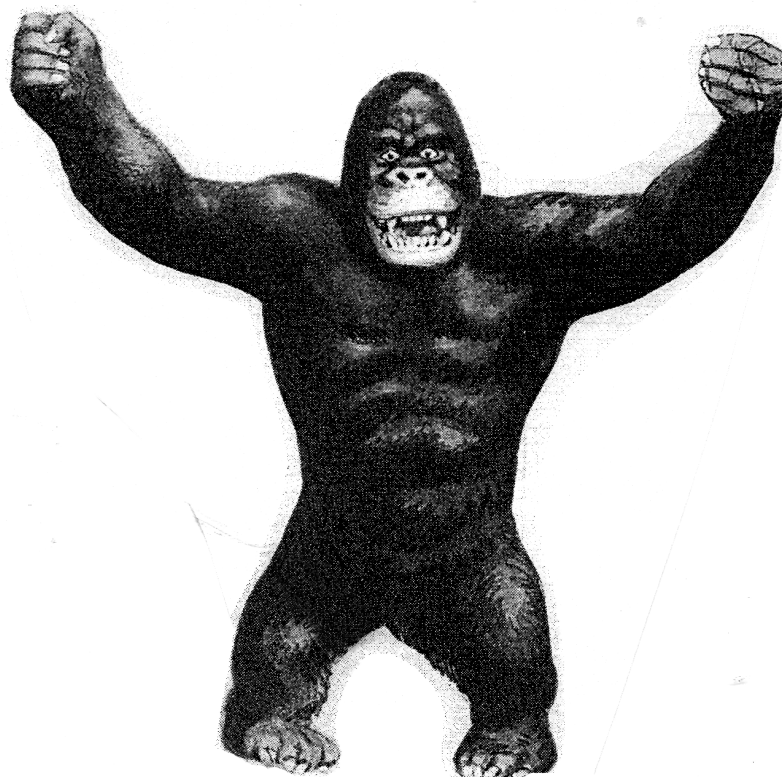
The Journal did not go on to mention that DDT has never been banned for fighting malaria, and that Rachel Carson's advice, if followed from the start, might have avoided the build-up of resistant strains of insects and the toxic overloading of the feed chain that led to its loss of effectiveness.

It was overuse of DDT that brought back malaria, not environmentalists, and certainly not Rachel Carson.

COBURN NOT THE ONLY NUT IN CONGRESS

Coburn is not alone in his ignorance of the facts. When the bill to name the post office after Rachel Carson went through the House in April, more than 50 members voted "No," an almost unprecedented number for such legislation.

Indeed, there is a cottage industry on the reactionary right to blame Rachel Carson for almost all of the world's ills.



Why is her memory still so charged? Perhaps because she was one of the first to use modern science to reveal the risks of over-use and over-reliance on technology.

Science, when she wrote her book, was seen as a Promethean tool to conquer nature. She deployed science as a moral parable to warn us that we needed to walk more humbly in the world.

Indeed, in the *New Yorker*, Elizabeth Kolbert makes a striking comparison between the kind of mindless reliance on pesticides like MIREX, which Rachel Carson exposed, and the current disdain for science shown by the Bush Administration.

So it's remarkable, but this quiet woman, decades after she died, still stands as a focal point in the debate over whether or not we should take seriously the warning signs that science sends us and the debate over whether our efforts to control nature in the pursuit of short-term benefits can backfire and hurt us badly instead.

[Full disclosure: The Sierra Club receives some of the royalties that flow to Carson's estate from ongoing sales of *Silent Spring*, so her opponents may now argue that the club's views on her legacy are tainted.]

– The author is the Sierra Club's executive director

FORT SILL

From Page 7

ing them to follow up.

Readers wrote in droves telling me of their own PTRP experiences at other posts. Some sent the story to their representatives, and Scarano's father was calling for a Congressional inquiry.

NOTHING HAS HAPPENED

Nothing happened. Ralph Blumenthal of the *New York Times* wrote an excellent piece on the case, and in it Army officials chalked up the 21-year-old's unfortunate end to lessons learned.

A year later letters continue dribbling into my e-mail box.

"Ft. Sill still doing it," read the subject line of a February letter from a woman who said her nephew was sick with pneumonia and asthma and had been kicked in the chest by a drill sergeant.

When I asked for more information, she didn't reply.

"You must never use our names," wrote a mother whose son had been in Fort Benning's PTRP last year and was then forced to do basic training twice.

Actually, she never gave me the names, not of herself or her son or the soldier he said had committed suicide while he was there. People don't want to give names to journalists for the same reason they don't complain to the higher-ups, which makes challenging higher-ups on their behalf difficult.

deVarennes spoke up because she was scared that if she didn't, someone might die at Fort Sill.

BROKEN FINGER ENDED UP DEFORMED

Her son had told her about a soldier who came into PTRP with a broken finger. It didn't heal properly for some reason and ended up deformed, his hand at less than 100% and his ability to do pushups impaired.

He was in PTRP for about nine months trying, and failing, to pass the PT test. One day, he cut himself all over with a razor, smeared himself with excrement, marched naked out of the barracks and was put in a psych ward on suicide watch.

Afterwards, no doubt pumped with antidepressants, he was made to try the test one more time, and to fail one more time, before officials moved to discharge him.

He didn't die. Neither did deVarennes's son, Pvt. Richard Thurman.

Richard got stress fractures and couldn't run, it was determined, because he had flat feet.

NO LONGER DISQUALIFIED BY FLAT FEET

Once upon a time flat feet disqualified one from military service. After months in the netherworld of PTRP, Richard still couldn't run but was cleared for active duty. He is now in Iraq.

I thought of Scarano and the others when I read the stories about Walter Reed. The *Washington Post's* riveting account of Feb. 18 included the story of Cpl. Jeremy Harper, 19, who had seen three of his buddies die in Iraq and was at Walter Reed for severe PTSD.

He refused his medals and kept to his room in the dark, heavily medicated, which everyone noticed.

Gen. George Weightman told the *Post* that the reason injured soldiers stay so long in the military/medical limbo is that the Army needs to hold on to as many soldiers as it can.

It patches up the damaged to send them back into battle, as Mark Benjamin reported in *Salon* from Fort Benning in March, redeploying troops who, doctors say, are medically unfit, altering medical profiles so that they can kill again.

THE ARMY AS DRUG PUSHER

It pushes antidepressants on the psychically damaged in the field to keep up the numbers, as Lisa Chedekel and Matthew Kauffman stunningly detailed in the *Hartford Courant* last May. It displays the injured at basic training posts as a demonstration to the healthy of its caring, and as a warning.

On April 20, I received an e-mail from a 24-year-old new recruit from Illinois named Travis Meyers. He had arrived at Fort Sill on Feb. 6, he said, and on his third day there he sat down with a member of post personnel for "a medical moment of truth."

Recruiters don't bother to assess the medical fitness of the people they sign up. At basic training, Army personnel have to ask about pre-existing conditions, but once presented with a warm body in uniform they are loath to accept any truth that might send that body home.

THEY TOOK A RECRUIT WITH HEART DISEASE

Meyers revealed that a doctor once told him he has heart disease.

"The reason that I came forward," he told me, "is because the push-ups that we were forced to do and the stress of being yelled at and degraded at any chance had made my chest start hurting extremely bad."

He said he had not taken the warning from his civilian doctor seriously before because the condition had never affected him in this way. After dueling EKGs and contradictory medical opinions, Fort Sill decided Meyers was fit for basic training.

On March 5, Pvt. Travis Meyers went AWOL. When he wrote he said he was soon to turn himself in: "I'm scared, but not as scared as I would be to go through basic with the way my heart is."

His is a normal story, in which the prospect of prison is a step up.

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BOOKS

Great Outdoors '07: Surfin' And Duct Tape

By Mike Nobles

OUTDOORS ONLINE

An Internet Guide to Everything Wild and Green
by Erika Dillman
The Mountaineers Books
224 pages, \$14.95

DON'T FORGET THE DUCT TAPE

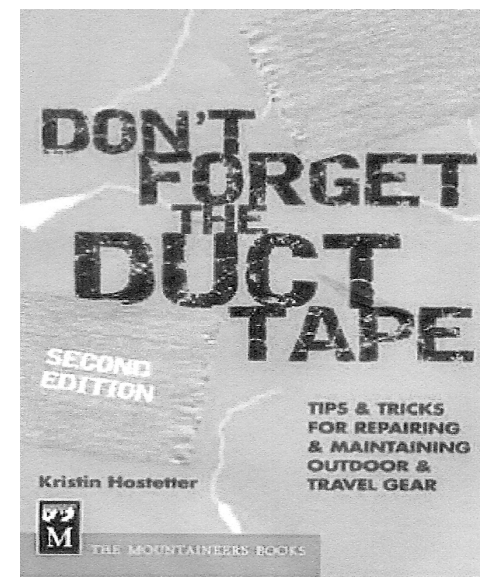
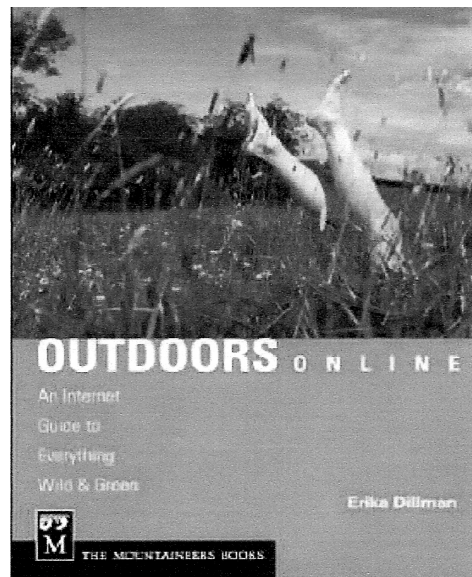
Tips and Tricks for Repairing and Maintaining Outdoor and Travel Gear
By Kristin Hostetter
The Mountaineers Books
96 pages, \$7.95

I have an admission to make: I am a fan of The Mountaineers Books. They publish some of the most useful, informative, readable books on all things outdoors on the market today. Not only are they typically well written and relatively inexpensive but they usually will appeal to both the boots on the ground types and the armchair traveler. These two new releases are a good example of the range of their offerings and worthy of the readers' time.

The first, *Outdoors Online*, is a great, must-have guide to Internet sites related to outdoors activities and sports such as gear, travel, wildlife, climbing, hiking, skiing, cycling, camping, paddle sports and just about everything in-between. This is one of those type books that make you wonder, "Why didn't I think of that?"

Utilizing chapters such as Outdoors on Foot; Outdoors on Wheels; Outdoors on Water; Outdoors on Snow along with Things to Do and Places to Go, Wildlife, Gear, and the indispensable The Great Outdoors, the reader is provided with a gold mine of information on everything outdoorsy online.

If you are looking for an honest evaluation of bookmark-worthy sites and blogs dedicated to all things wild and green this is the book for you. You can probably spend more for the same information but you can't find a better, more informa-



tive read. The author has a knack of writing in a manner that makes you feel she is visiting with readers rather than talking down to them.

The second book, *Don't Forget the Duct Tape*, is just about the handiest, most informative guide to an item probably found more often in a backpack or tool box than a Leatherman Tool. Who doesn't have a least one, and probably multiple rolls, of duct tape in various stages of use in and around their home?

I know I do. What I didn't realize is the myriad uses for duct tape in repairing outdoor and travel gear. This marvelous little book not only provides a host of tips for using duct tape, from treating blisters, constructing a spoon, or making a zipper pull but it also provides tips for when not to use it.

In addition to indispensable advice on the do's and don'ts of duct tape use there are sections on repairing virtually all types of outdoor equipment and fabrics including technical wool garments, soft-shell fabrics, single-wall tents, and hydration systems. Also, the author has included a suggested, inexpensive 12-item repair kit that weighs little more than a pound or two including how to carry duct tape without the roll! Not to be missed is the section on Seam Grip that many readers may not be familiar with but has an amazing capability as a repair tool. The book has more than 50 different uses for Seam Grip and is worth the price of the book alone.

If you are not familiar with The Mountaineers Books these two offerings would be a good place to begin. They are the folks that have also just published the physician-written *The Don't Die Out There!: Deck* of essential survival tips that could save your life. There is not space to review this unique publication in depth but for anyone venturing into the outdoors it is worth a look.

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

Old Ways And New Collide in Navajo Novel

By Norm Rourke

TURQUOISE GIRL

An Ella Clah Novel
By Aimee and David Thurlo
St. Martin's Press
320 pages, \$23.95

Special Investigator Ella Clah of the Navajo Police is back. Once again she must walk a fine line between Navajo traditionalists and modernists as she seeks to solve a series of violent murders of young Navajo. And this time, the crimes get close.

The crime scenes recall her days in the FBI. A Bible verse on a scrap of paper left near the body reminds Ella of a case she worked a decade earlier when she was an FBI agent.

But more importantly the clues point to Caleb Frank, a violently zealous man whom Ella's father excommunicated years earlier. Caleb Frank was a successful Navajo businessman who had been the lover of all the dead women.

Caleb frequently quoted the Old Testament to support his believe that sinners had to be punished here on earth. Was he again carrying out his personal brand of Biblical vengeance?

As the killer's motives become more clear, Ella learns that her friend Boots is in line as the next victim. It is Boots who cares for Ella's daughter after school. Each of the previous victims had children who were killed within a few month's of their mother's death.

Ella fears her daughter may be caught in a crossfire of murder if Boots is the next victim.

The Thurlos have blended Navajo life and beliefs in *Turquoise Girl* and offer readers an insight into a unique and colorful culture. They provide insight into the sometimes conflicting beliefs of older Navajo and those who must live in a rapidly changing world.

Navajo Reservation life in New Mexico is the backdrop for this latest in the Ella Clah Novel. Old and new readers will be richly rewarded.

- The author lives in Beggs

The Patriots Who Made July 4th Special

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died.

Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.

Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured.

Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War.

They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they?

Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists.

Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means, well educated, but they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags.

Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family

was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward.

Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr., noted that the British Gen. Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged Gen. George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished.

Some of us take these liberties so much for granted, but we shouldn't.

So, take a few minutes while enjoying your Fourth of July holiday and silently thank these patriots. It's not much to ask for the price they paid.

Remember: freedom is never free!

It's time we get the word out that patriotism is NOT a sin, and the Fourth of July has more to it than beer, picnics, and baseball games!

- Thanks to Joyce Birdwell for this gem

Congressional Reform **Ignore Venal Media, Dems Scoring Big**

By Frosty Troy

Despite the Daily Disappointment ignoring the truth – and no thanks to Oklahoma's Republican delegation – the 110th Democratic Congress has scored major successes.

They did so despite opposition from an incompetent President, a divided Senate and reactionary House members.

Check the record, not George Will's columns. The Democratic Congress has achieved concrete results and the record proves it.

The House of Representatives has passed all 10 measures Democrats promised during the 2006 campaign, including enacting the 9/11 Commission recommendations, land-mark lobbying reform, ethics reform, the first minimum wage increase in a decade, and a stem cell research expansion.

The divided Senate has passed six of the 10; three others are currently being considered. Bush has signed just two of the bills. He has vetoed or threatened to veto five; the rest are pending.

DEMOCRATS RISE IN NATIONAL POLLING

New polls rating Congress are down sharply for Republicans, but up for Democrats, who win approval from 52%. Republicans win approval from less than 25%.

The country is undoubtedly frustrated that President Bush's conservative allies have blocked a major change in Iraq strategy. The so-called surge is yet to work, despite even more troops being sent.

Don't believe the corporate-owned national media. On a wide array of issues, Democrats are proving extremely effective, holding the Bush Administration accountable, and winning key legislative victories.

From tough new congressional ethics rules, bans on gifts from lobbyists, and the most transparent earmarking system ever established, Congress has honored its pledge for more openness and accountability.

9/11 RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTED

Both the House and Senate have voted to implement the critical recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, which Bush and Congress selectively ignored for five years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Both voted to expand federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.

That's a cause that Bush has stubbornly vowed to veto for a second time, citing junk science when authorities in the field have proven only they work.

Major opposition is coming from the Catholic Church hierarchy, despite the fact that billions of cells are discarded each year – Galileo all over again.

Congress is cleaning up the system in other ways – creating new protections for government whistle blowers, requiring greater disclosure of presidential records, and more responsiveness from Freedom of Information Act requests.

After a decade of delay, Congress approved a raise in the federal minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour, benefiting millions of Americans. Bush signed the bill after pledging to issue a veto.

VETERANS WIN UNDER DEMOCRATS

After Bush's gross mishandling of veterans affairs was exposed, Democrats included billions more than the President requested for military health care and research in the 2007 Emergency Supplemental, which he reluctantly signed.

The 110th Congress restored necessary checks and balances, in contrast to the dangerous expansion of executive authority granted by previous Congresses.

Congress drove Bush to sign the Preserving United States Attorney Independence Act, which repeals an obscure Patriot Act provision permitting the appointment of interim U.S. attorneys without Senate approval.

That was a provision which is at the heart of the U.S. attorney scandal, one that has led to the resignation of three top aides to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales.

OKLAHOMA DEMOCRATS

From Page 6

none of them were coordinated," he said. A further complication: Some Democratic constituencies aren't always very tolerant of each other.

Holmes said he works until midnight most days. By mid-June, he'd already lined up 24 speaking engagements with Democratic groups across the state. And he vowed to work with grass-roots activists in all 77 counties.

He's also revamped the state party staff, hiring Todd Goodman, who helped run state Sen. Andrew Rice's 2006 campaign, as a field operative, and Jeremy Hendricks, who worked at the state headquarters under former executive director Jay Parmley, as communications director.

HE HOPES TO HIRE TWO MORE

Holmes also said he would be filling a third position at the state party headquarters, perhaps by late June. And he's asked the Democratic National Committee to help pay for a fourth slot, as well, so he can locate a field operative in Tulsa.

Holmes isn't accepting any salary for serving as state party chairman. He's living on \$2,000 retirement income in a small Oklahoma City duplex, with spartan furnishings, his bed on the floor.

It's a two-year commitment, he said, nothing more.



Congress is examining new ways to curb Bush's warrantless wiretapping system, which even FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledges is laden with "abuses and violations" of authority.

FBI'S POLITICAL CORRUPTION

Thousands of secret wiretaps have proven to be illegal, one more nail in the coffin of an FBI mired in political corruption.

"You must ask the questions. You must do oversight if we're going to keep people honest, if we're going to provide the checks and balances that our Constitution envisions," House Oversight Committee chairman Henry Waxman, D-CA, said.

In the previous Congress, oversight of the executive branch was woefully neglected by Bush's far right Republican allies.

For example, in the Republican 108th Congress the House Government Reform Committee held only 37 hearings described as "oversight," including a mere 12 hours of sworn testimony about the abuse of prisoners at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

AMONG THE ROARING SUCCESSES

In the first six months of 2007 alone, the Democratically-controlled committee has already held 33 hearings on previously ignored subjects such as:

- Waste, fraud, and abuse in Iraq reconstruction;
- Political doctoring of a government climate change study produced by scientists;
- The reliance on private military contractors.

Overall, Congress has held more than 200 oversight hearings on issues related to the Iraq war alone.

Aggressive efforts by the Democratic Congress have already resulted in a bevy of resignations by scandal-plagued members of the executive branch.

THREE FLEE SINKING SHIP

At the Justice Department, three of Gonzales' top aides resigned as part of the ongoing U.S. attorney scandal investigation.

A week before an oversight hearing, Julie MacDonald of the Interior Department resigned amid charges that she had censored scientists.

Following the revelations of neglect and abuse at Walter Reed Medical Center, the new Congress swept into action with hearings and oversight, resulting in the resignations of the Center's commander, the Army Surgeon General, and the Secretary of the Army – accountability that was unlikely to happen in the previous Congress.

With the exception of Democratic Rep. Dan Boren, the five Republican Oklahomans voted against all reform initiatives.

Boren too often sided with Bush on major initiatives such as tax cuts for the super-rich, but has come home on many Democratic initiatives.

Hang your head in shame if you voted for Sens. James Inhofe and Tom Coburn, and Reps. John Sullivan, Frank Lucas, Tom Cole and Mary Fallin.

Oklahoma was once known as a power in Washington. Now, according to Washington rankings on effectiveness, Oklahoma is at the bottom.

“This isn't a lifelong thing to me,” said Holmes, who taught journalism at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah and later served as athletic marketing director under NFL great Forrest Gregg at SMU in Dallas.

“I keep wanting to retire. I don't know why I'm here. But I'm not doing it for ego. I'm not doing it for the money. I'm not doing it for a job. I'm not doing it to run for anything. I'm just trying to give back – kind of the last thing I do.

“And maybe it's a pipe dream. Maybe I can't do it. Maybe the grass roots aren't important anymore. I don't know. I'm going to find out.”

The Wise Man

Three clever men and one wise man are walking in the desert, when they find the bleached skeleton of a lion.

The first clever man says, “I can rebuild the skeleton,” and does so.
The second clever man says, “I can rebuild the muscles and organs,” and does so.

The third clever man says, “I can breathe the spirit of life back into the body,” and does so.

The wise man says, “Excuse me, but I am going to climb this tree.”

John Wayne Myths On His Centennial

By Ed Rampell and Luis Reyes

Hey, gunslinger: John Wayne donned military gear in "Sands of Iwo Jima" [1949], but he was missing in action on the real war front.

This year is the centennial of John Wayne, born May 26, 1907, in Winterset, IA. The 2007 Harris poll of America's favorite movie stars places the Duke at No.3. A remarkable ranking, considering Wayne's last picture was 1976's "The Shootist" and he died 28 years ago.

While many of his contemporaries, including Henry Fonda, and Clark Gable, served in the armed forces during World War II, the lead in such wartime sagas as 1945's "They Were Expendable," 1948's "Fort Apache" and 1968's "The Green Berets" did not.

Wayne was not only missing in action during the 1940s' liberation of the Philippines and Europe, he wasn't a cavalry officer, a Vietnam commando or a Leatherneck-flying or otherwise – for he was never in the military.

HE WAS A WW II DRAFT DODGER

According to Gary Wills' book *John Wayne's America*, the man who portrayed the archetypal, battle-hardened Marine, Sgt. Stryker, in 1949's "The Sands of Iwo Jima," actually avoided the draft during World War II.

Wills wrote that the Duke did not reply to letters from the Selective Service system, and applied for deferments.

Apparently, Wayne – who had sought stardom during years of B-pictures following Raoul Walsh's 1930 frontier drama "The Big Trail" – got his big break during the struggle against fascism when many Hollywood action heroes such as Tyrone Power enlisted and shipped out overseas.

With much of the competition away in the Pacific and European theaters, Wayne was able to storm movie theaters to solidify his stardom.

THE SAFETY OF TINSELTOWN

While Jimmy Stewart and his fellow celebrity servicemen were real action heroes, Wayne was a "Lights! Cameras! Action!" hero who merely played the part in the safety of Tinseltown's home front and back lot.

Director John Ford discovered Wayne when he was on USC's football team, and with his rugged physique, the 6-foot-4-inch Duke was identified with American machismo.

Wayne was a vocal conservative, and his critics contend that the onscreen "Injun killer" was racist off-screen.

In an infamous 1971 Playboy magazine interview, the Duke made insensitive comments about blacks and said this about America's indigenous people: "I don't feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them. Our so-called stealing of this country from them was just a matter of survival. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves."

A VIRULENT ANTI-COMMUNIST

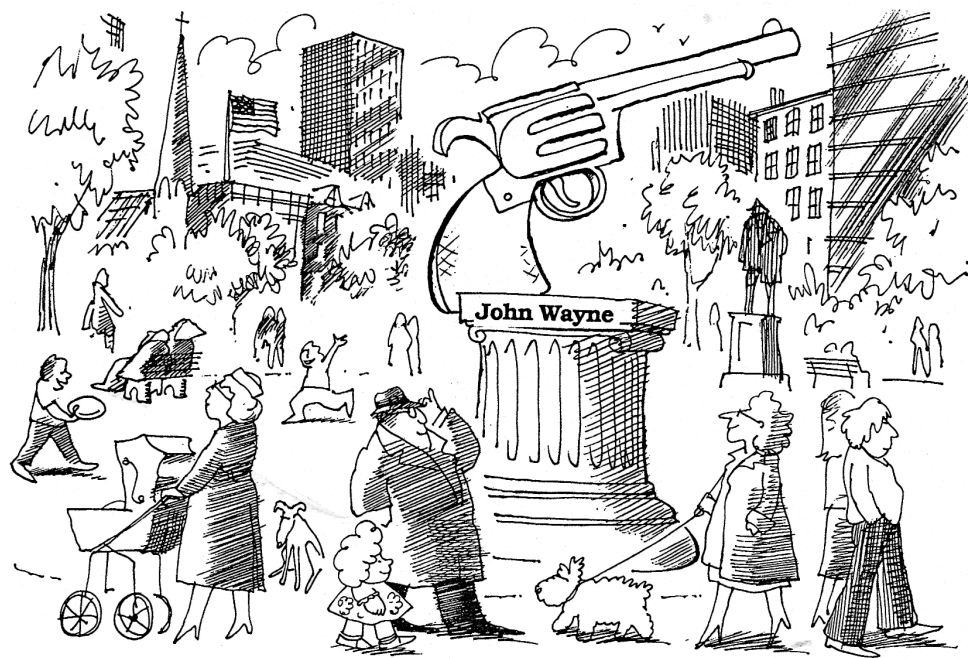
A virulent anti-communist, Wayne was president of the rightwing Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and cheered the Hollywood blacklist during the House Un-American Activities Committee's purge of entertainment industry leftists.

He starred in Red Menace movies such as *The Hawaii 7*, wherein suspected communists, including longshoreman union leader Jack Hall, were charged with advocating the overthrow of the American government. Wayne plays two-fisted federal agent Jim McLain – his name bears the same initials as Sen. Joe McCarthy's – who busts Honolulu's commies.

In the crowning irony of the conservative's career, Wayne finally struck Oscar gold for playing Rooster Cogburn in 1969's "True Grit" – written for the screen by ex-communist Marguerite Roberts, blacklisted in 1952 for refusing to inform on leftists.

HIS MEETING WITH TWO DICTATORS

At the height of the Cold War, Nikita Khrushchev visited America and asked to meet Wayne, who met the Soviet premier at President Eisenhower's request. [Wayne also met with Emperor Hirohito during the WWII leader's 1975 state visit



to America.]

An outspoken hawk during the Vietnam War, Wayne co-directed and starred in the Pentagon-subsidized propaganda picture "The Green Berets."

Duke denounced antiwar protesters, reportedly saying: "As far as I'm concerned, it wouldn't bother me a bit to pull the trigger on one of 'em."

Wayne was, in reality, a draft dodger. America's archetypal soldier was in fact a chicken hawk. He was a cheerleader and champion of militaristic patriotism and combat he had never experienced.

Wayne had "other priorities" during WWII – achieving super stardom [and saving his neck] was more important than defeating fascism.

HE WAS VERY MUCH LIKE DICK CHENEY

Much like Vice President Dick Cheney, who sought numerous deferments during the Vietnam War, Wayne was the quintessential war wimp.

According to his third wife, Pilar Wayne, her husband "would become a 'super patriot' for the rest of his life trying to atone for staying home" during WWII.

Like Wayne, the current crop of GOP chicken hawks are great actors, overcompensating for their previous patriotic failings [draft dodging, etc.] by sounding the jingoistic battle cry for a new generation of working-class sons and daughters to go to war.

Or as George W. Bush did in a priceless moment of Hollywood flourish, dressing up in a flight suit to declare a failing and deadly war in Iraq a "mission accomplished."

Unfortunately, America is manipulated by the military-industrial-entertainment complex. John Ford's "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" put it: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

LIES AND FANTASIES HAVE CONSEQUENCES

But these lies and fantasies have consequences in real life for those mistakenly buying into them.

Veteran Ron Kovic, who was portrayed by Tom Cruise in Oliver Stone's 1989 "Born on the Fourth of July," was paralyzed from the waist down in Vietnam, and was a Wayne critic.

It's interesting that Wayne's last public appearance was when he presented the best picture Oscar in 1979 to Michael Cimino's "The Deer Hunter," a Vietnam film that raised questions about honor and patriotism.

On the 100th anniversary of the Duke's birth, Americans need to distinguish between myth and deadly realities. We must reexamine America's love affair with settling disputes through gunplay, and question people and institutions that demand that the young sacrifice their minds and bodies in tribute to these actors [of the stage and political theater] and the violence they celebrate.

Maybe then, when the truth and not the legend is printed, we can agree with the 1960s' prototypical protester, Abbie Hoffman, who quipped after Wayne's death: "Even cavemen felt a little admiration for the dinosaurs that were trying to gobble them up."

– Luis Reyes and Ed Rampell co-authored "Made In Paradise: Hollywood's Films of Hawaii and the South Seas" and "Pearl Harbor in the Movies"

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In Today's America, The Bumper Is The Message

Former Methodist minister Jerry Paul of Lakeside, OH, collected these bumper sticker messages, shared with us by George Bullet of Vian:

1/20/09: End of an Error

That's OK, I Wasn't Using My Civil Liberties Anyway

If You Want a Nation Ruled By Religion, Move to Iran

If You Can Read This, You're Not Our President

Hey, Bush Supporters: Embarrassed Yet?

George Bush: Creating the Terrorists Our Kids Will Have to Fight

America: One Nation, Under Surveillance

No, Seriously, Why Did We Invade Iraq?

We Need a President Who's Fluent In At Least One Language

Bush Is Making Enemies Faster Than We Can Kill Them

Is It Vietnam Yet?

Where Are We Going? And Why Are We In This Handbasket?

You Elected Him. You Deserve Him.

Impeach Cheney First

Dubya, Your Dad Shoulda Pulled Out, Too

When Bush Took Office, Gas Was \$1.46

The Republican Party: Our Bridge to the 11th Century

What Part of "Bush Lied" Don't You Understand?

Blind Faith In Bad Leadership Is Not Patriotism

If You Supported Bush, A Yellow Ribbon Won't Make Up For it

Poverty, Health Care & Homelessness Are Moral Issues

Religious Fundamentalism: A Threat Abroad, A Threat At Home

Annoy A Conservative: Think For Yourself

Bush Spent Your Social Security On His War

Hey Bush! Where's Bin Laden?

Stop Mad Cowboy Disease

Honor Our Troops: Demand The Truth

Stem Cell Research Is Pro Life

Hate, Greed, Ignorance: True Weapons Of Mass Deception

Keep Your Theocracy Off My Democracy

Don't Confuse Dying For Oil With Fighting For Freedom

Feel Safer Now?

Dissent Is The Highest Form Of Patriotism [Thomas Jefferson]

God Bless Everyone! [No Exceptions]

Unemployment Of Black Males Crisis

By James Wright

The black male unemployment rate is unacceptably high and it is time for the federal government to do something about it.

That was the conclusion of a recent hearing by the Joint Economic Committee, a bicameral, bipartisan committee of U.S. representatives and senators who are charged with studying the nation's economy and making recommendations to the government for changes, if necessary.

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-NY, is the chairman of the committee. He convened the hearing as a part of a series dealing with America's unemployment rate despite record economic growth in many parts of the country.

There are no black members of the committee because Sen. Barack Obama, D-IL, opted not to sit on it.

Schumer bemoaned the high rate of unemployment among young black males.

"The crisis is profound, persistent and perplexing," he said. "Both across the country and particularly in my home state of New York, far too many black men are facing difficulty finding and keeping work. The numbers are staggering and getting worse, particularly for young black males."

FEW BLACK DROPOUTS ARE EMPLOYED

Schumer noted that in 1999, 65% of black male high school dropouts in their 20s were jobless. He said that by 2004, the share had increased to 72% as compared to 29% of whites and 19% of Latinos.

New York's senior senator said that the incarceration rate of young black males is at historic highs, more than half of black males do not finish high school, and a black man in his 20s without a high school diploma is more likely to be in jail than to be working.

Schumer said that these grim statistics do not make sense.

"One reason this crisis is perplexing is because it is playing out against a backdrop of relative economic success and unprecedented historical advances for many sectors of our nation's African-American population," he said.

"Obviously we know the stories of highly successful black men and women. And more importantly there are burgeoning black middle class communities throughout the country and lower income black women who have made impressive gains in terms of work force participation in just the last few years."

A STRONGER FAMILY STRUCTURE NEEDED

Sen. Sam Brownback, R-KS, who sits on the committee and is a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, said that black males could benefit from a stronger family structure.

"Study after study shows that children are less likely to live in poverty or go to jail if they come from a two-parent home," Brownback said.

"While the problems facing young African-American males demand action on



several fronts, we will not start from a strong foundation if we don't get the basics right and increase the number of two-parent homes."

Brownback said that his idea of Marriage Development Accounts, which essentially pays money for people to get married, is being looked at seriously in Washington, DC, and other cities should try it.

GRADUATE, WAIT FOR MARRIAGE TO HAVE KIDS

"Common sense tell us that if we help young African-American males graduate from high school and wait until marriage before having children, it will be easier for them to find and keep a job," he said.

STRIVE, which was founded in New York in 1984, works with its participants on proper attitudes to aid in getting and keeping a job, technical skills, self-esteem and self-actualization, and stabilizing one's life.

The organization drew the praise of Schumer, who said that "my visit there was the best of my term as a U.S. senator."

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-NY, who is not a member of the committee but is running for the Democratic nomination for president, said:

"There is no reason why in 2007, in these United States of America, that our government cannot takes steps to ensure an equality of opportunity for all Americans and address the troubling unemployment rate of African-American males. I believe that over the last six years, we've only lacked the leadership, commitment and vision to take action."

The Afro-American News

America's Working Class Enslaved Again

By Colin T. Bent

Some years ago, this black man took stock of the problems of the working class, all of it, and coined the term the "niggerization of America." In my recent reading, I was shocked, but supported in my thinking when I saw the same term used by a most admired philosopher and great thinker, Cornel West in his book *Democracy Matters*.

I do not know how he arrived at that term but I know I happened upon it by my own experience in the professional world and that of others of my fellow citizens and the grave similarity of our experiences to that of the slaves from our recent past. Now let me say that although my ancestors were slaves that mine were situated in another country in this very region.

The similarity of the times is indeed troubling. From what I have been taught, black folks [slaves] enjoyed 100% employment but the standard of living was questionable. What we, the workers, are now confronted with is very similar, in that the Corporate Barons have systematically diminished all legal protections for workers while decreasing real dollar remuneration, eliminating working benefits due to so-called high labor costs and inventing a new class of underemployed, overworked people called "independent contractors."

So one day, when the workers of America awaken from their stupor of servitude, they will find that they are basically hard working poor people with no way of bettering themselves and no way to provide a respectable lifestyle in their twilight years.

SLAVE MENTALITY IN THE WORKING CLASS

I noticed a mentality of slavery pervasive in the attitude of working class people and wondered how this cloak of servitude had been so conveniently thrown over the eyes of so many. This is quite similar to the days of free labor that made a small group of land owners very wealthy.

The situation is no longer limited to any one race but rather an entire class of hardworking law abiding but very naive people who have bought into the myth called the American Dream or the Free Enterprise System.

Can we ever escape this bondage and claim our rights? I do hope so because this experiment, America's Democracy, was never meant for as diverse a citizenship as we now have.

But I do believe that the founders in general meant for this to be a constantly

evolving society, indeed, with liberty and justice for all. But will we ever remove ourselves from the plough long enough to realize our strength and throw off this albatross of niggerization?

I hope so, but first, the working class - the "sufferers" - must realize that our fractious appearance is played up by those who would diminish our true power as a people. Our real value to this country lies largely in our productivity as a group and less in our ethnicity, although that in itself is of great importance.

TIME FOR NATION'S BUILDERS TO BE POSSESSORS, TOO

We have all been made slaves by this country's owners and possess very little ownership although we are the de facto creators of the wealth. It is about time that the builders of this nation become possessors also.

Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from last year's "outing" of the Rev. Ted Haggard by the gay prostitute. And I say this with a great deal of pain and empathy for a man who admittedly suffered for most of his adult life attempting to rid himself of his homosexual tendencies.

Many of his congregants easily chalked this up to a mistake on his part and quickly forgave him for his "sin." But did they ever hone in on the real sin in the matter? I really do believe that the sin committed was the sin of hypocrisy and not the sin of being a homosexual.

For while Rev. Haggard shrouded himself with the trappings of a heterosexual family man and while he mercilessly attacked those of a gay and lesbian lifestyle, he fought to hide his own homosexuality and committed the very acts that he condemned.

The religious world should be very careful not to condemn all gays and lesbians as sinners because, try as much as they want, this way of life will never be "covered under the blood" or eradicated by exorcism.

Perhaps the real answer lies not in us trying to change gays and lesbians but in the rest of us who call ourselves "straight" educating ourselves as to the scientific explanation as to why 10% of all our fellow human beings the world over find it necessary to love others of their own sex.

It is my belief that Rev. Ted did not sin by satisfying his lust in this case but rather by indulging in the very actions for which he excoriated others.

- The author lives in Tulsa

Liberal Democrat Helping Veterans

By Ari Berman

After Congressman Bob Filner read the Washington Post's series on the scandalous treatment of injured soldiers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, he called Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and delivered a simple message: Their party had to fund the wounded warriors as well as the war – or instead of it.

For years Filner, a liberal Democrat who represents the military stronghold of San Diego, had been warning that the country's military and veterans hospitals were strained to the breaking point.

In the wake of Walter Reed, the public and the party were finally listening. House Democrats added \$3.5 billion to an Iraq spending bill to treat brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] for returning soldiers and upgrade the country's 1,400 deteriorating veterans hospitals.

As the new chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Filner is now in a position to translate his advocacy into action. "This is a test for our party," he said.

CLEARLY THE REPUBLICANS FAILED

Filner told me during an interview in his Washington office, which looks directly out on the Capitol dome, "Clearly, the Republicans failed. I hope we pass it."

Although he retains the look of a mild-mannered professor [he taught history at San Diego State for 22 years], Filner is passionate about his causes. As a student in 1961, he spent two months in a Mississippi jail for civil rights protesting with the Freedom Riders.

When the Department of Veterans Affairs [VA] lost a laptop containing confidential data on 26 million veterans, Filner interrupted a VA press conference by yelling at two VA officials, "You guys f---- it up!"

He called on VA Secretary Jim Nicholson, a former head of the Republican National Committee who's been compared to ex-FEMA chief Michael "Brownie" Brown, to resign. Critics have said that Filner is too emotional.

VETERANS WANT A BULLDOG CHAIRMAN

Tim Walz, a freshman Democrat on Filner's committee who spent 24 years in the Minnesota National Guard, disagrees. "As a vet," Walz says, "I want a bulldog there that's fighting for us."

Veterans aren't giving Filner a grace period, even as they welcome his arrival. The Bush Administration chose to run the "war on terror" expensively abroad and cheaply at home.

In 2004, when then-VA chair Chris Smith tried to add \$1.3 billion to fully fund VA healthcare, Republicans booted him off the committee. His replacement, hard-

Forest Reviews Are Banished By Feds

Citizen activists have been a bane to the Bush administration – particularly on environmental regulations.

They ask questions. They file lawsuits. They try to thwart nearly every administration attempt to cut the red tape surrounding use of the nation's natural resources and wind up adding greatly to the cost of these gambits.

So the administration has decided to simply eliminate the bothersome environmental reviews previously applied to management plans for the 193 million acres of national forest.

If there's no requirement to consider the impact of activities such as mineral extraction or hazardous waste shipments, those effects can't be used to challenge the plans.

Such efficiency comes at too high a price. Shutting citizens out of planning for the national forests is not only anti-democratic but a dangerously short-term approach to managing a resource intended to remain intact indefinitely.

DEMOCRATS OUGHT TO REVERSE IT

Democratic leaders in Congress should move quickly to reverse this regulatory outrage. But given the narrow margin in the Senate, it may well be up to the courts, once again, to protect the nation's heritage from the administration's shortsightedness.

Forest Service Bushites claim that the simple crafting of a forest management plan has no environmental impact and that specific projects conducted under the plan – clearing trees, installing transmission lines, building roads – would be subject to citizen and environmental review.

Maybe not. The new rule also makes it easier to exclude projects from such reviews. In any case, careful management of a scarce resource can't be conducted only on a case-by-case basis.

These resources are increasingly scarce. By the Forest Service's own reckoning, development consumes 6,000 acres of open space every day in the United States.

THE LOSS OF FORESTS MOUNTING

Ten million acres of forest were lost between 1982 and 1997. Another 26 million more acres of forest land – about the size of Tennessee – is expected to disappear by 2030.

The consequences of this loss are not just sentimental. Open space and forests in particular play a critical role in cleaning the air and protecting drinking water supplies.

Federal forest managers should be moving to acquire and protect more private open space – not facilitating the exploitation of public land that Americans believe has already been protected.

© The Baltimore Sun

line conservative Steve Buyer, was put there, in the words of a top GOP aide, "to tell the veterans groups: Enough is enough."

This year, the Administration brags that it has produced the largest VA budget in history. That's true – but veterans groups say the \$37.1 billion for fiscal year 2008 is not nearly enough to meet the needs of returning servicemen and women and aging vets.

URGENT REPAIRS, MEDICAL CARE NEEDED

VA hospitals across the country require urgent repair. At least one in four Iraq and Afghanistan vets is suffering from severe mental injury, including PTSD, to say nothing of physical wounds.

The VA has a backlog of 600,000 benefit claims, which means veterans can wait years for disability compensation. The Army is discharging maimed Iraq vets with misdiagnosed "personality disorders" in order to deny them such benefits.

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july 8 — rev. dr. opio toure

Opio serves as Assistant Pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church of Meridian, Oklahoma. A native of Muskogee, Opio is an Assistant Professor at Langston University, a former state legislator and practicing attorney. He and his wife of 31 years, Linda Ware, are the parents of two sons (and the grandparents of three darling grandchildren). Opio is a graduate of Phillips Theological Seminary, Langston University, and the University of Oklahoma School of Law. Opio contends that the church must shed its Constantinian clothing and return wholesale to being the prophetic voice.

july 15 — nancy claire pittman

Nancy was ordained into the ministry by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest in 1984. She has served as a minister in several churches across Texas or Oklahoma and preached or lectured as a guest speaker in numerous congregations and regional and national events. About six years ago she and her husband, Dr. Don A. Pittman, returned from Taiwan where they served for six and a half years as missionaries on the faculty of Tainan Theological College and Seminary, a school related to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan.

Currently, Nancy is Assistant Professor of the Practice of Ministry and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Phillips Theological Seminary where her husband is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean and Professor of the History of Religions. They have a daughter who just completed her freshman year at Texas Christian University.

july 22 — jesse williams, jr

Living on Purpose ... is a phrase that seems to best describe this man. A native of Rochester, New York, presently serving as Senior Associate Pastor of New Dimensions Worship Center, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Jesse is a Singer and Songwriter, Author, Life Coach, and a Ministry Development and Enhancement Consultant.

Purpose is his passion and drive for life. He is also the embodiment of the spirit of worship — a living expression of the love of God in the earth. He has an affable personality and presence that literally draws you in and an intelligent wit and sharpness, coupled with sincerity and sensitivity, that makes you want to remain somewhere in the atmosphere he helps to create. Everyone feels valued and valuable by the time Jessé gets through. Jessé enjoys inspiring and motivating people, spending time with family and friends, traveling, and simply loving people to life ...

july 29 — doug manning

Someone has said that communicators are rare, and Doug is well done. A former Baptist minister, he has spent the last 25 years as founder of his own publishing company, author of 25 books and public speaker in the areas of grief and elder care. He has been featured in national conferences and conventions throughout the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Get ready to think until you hurt and laugh until you stop hurting.

august 5 — rev. lance schmitz

Rev. Lance Schmitz is a fourth generation Oklahoman. He grew up in rural Oklahoma and graduated from Southern Nazarene University in 2000 with a BS in Christian Education. He is a member of several progressive groups in Oklahoma City and serves as the Minister of Social Justice at OKC 1st Church of the Nazarene. Lance is married to the beautiful and intelligent Ashley who is an RN at St Anthony Hospital

august 12 — kay bessler northcutt

Dr. Northcutt is an Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship at Phillips Theological Seminary. In addition to her teaching, she is an award winning author and an accomplished pianist. Dr. Northcutt is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who has served in the pastoral leadership of several congregations. Currently, she is a member of the International Bilateral Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

Dr. Robin Meyers invites you to expand your mind by visiting Mayflower Congregational Church this summer. From July 8 through August 12 where a diverse group of speakers will share their ideas for living faithfully. Mayflower is located at 3901 NW 63rd between Portland and the Northwest Expressway, 842-8897. The service is held at 10:45 am.

National Campaign To Censor Educators

By Mary O'Regan

A nationwide effort is underway in statehouses to foster "intellectual diversity" by censoring professors.

Political views in the United States are heavily divided, with each side worrying that the other is corrupting today's youth.

And who has more access to fresh, young minds than teachers? That's why the latest argument about when and where free speech flies is taking place in the classroom.

David Horowitz, a rightwing political radical who penned the "Academic Bill of Rights" as a guideline to intellectual freedom for students, is leading the movement and driving a number of legislative bills that would prevent instructors from voicing potentially controversial opinions.

Arizona legislation was defeated. It would have forbidden school district employees from advocating "one side of a social, political, or cultural issue that is a matter of partisan controversy."

THEY WOULD BE SUBJECT TO A FINE

Those who take up such stances would face a fine of up to \$500.

A similar bill in Missouri would have required that higher education institutions report on steps they've taken to "ensure intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas."

Universities would be required to report on efforts to, among other things, incorporate intellectual diversity concerns into their teaching guidelines, student course evaluations, and hiring, tenure, and promotion policies.

Silas Allen writes in the University of Missouri-Columbia's *Missourian* that the bill, which is also called the "Emily Brooker Intellectual Diversity Act," was inspired by a Christian student who refused to write an assigned paper in support of gay adoption.

AN OUT-OF-COURT SETTLEMENT

The matter ended up in court, with the college eventually reaching an out-of-court settlement.

According to Free Exchange on Campus, a coalition dedicated to protecting "the free exchange of speech and ideas on campus," intellectual diversity bills in states such as Georgia, Kentucky, and New York are in the works but few are passing.

The group recently celebrated defeat of Montana's bill. The measure sought to encourage "intellectual diversity, transparency, and accountability in the university system" through annual reports submitted to a legislative committee.

As Gwen Florio wrote in the *Great Falls Tribune*, "Opponents criticized the bill



as both unconstitutional – because the state Constitution gives the Board of Regents authority over universities – and unnecessary."

THEY ARE GIVEN A MODICUM OF HOPE

Small victories, though, have given hope to Horowitz and his supporters.

Horowitz announced on his blog that "two of the three major universities in Pennsylvania – Temple and Penn State – have now adopted 'student specific' bills of rights."

The Academic Freedom Policy on Penn State's website states that, "It is not the function of a faculty member in a democracy to indoctrinate his/her students with ready-made conclusions on controversial subjects." Temple University also lists similar guidelines.

Horowitz still has a long way to go. Free Exchange on Campus reports that "censoring what can and cannot be taught and discussed in the classroom – as the misleadingly titled 'Academic Bill of Rights' and so-called 'intellectual diversity' proposals attempt to do – curbs campus debate and limits learning."

They don't buy his claims that professors want to push their own agendas. And neither do some lawmakers.

As state Rep. Eve Franklin mused to the *Great Falls Tribune*, if university professors are so liberal, "why are there so many conservatives and constitutionalists in Montana who have attended our universities?"

Perhaps Horowitz, a former leftwinger, could lend some insight – after all, he went to Berkeley.

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Think Tank School Report Is Flawed

A recently released report published by the anti-public education Milton and Rose Friedman Foundation claims that school choice programs which subsidize private school attendance with public funds have, cumulatively over 15 years, "saved" taxpayers nearly half a billion dollars.

But a new review of that report concludes the claims of savings are misleading, oversimplified and, even if accurate, insignificant – less than 1/100th of one percent of annual public school spending, or about 60 cents per child per year.

Further, the Friedman report does not address the issue of school quality, which is a large part of determining true cost savings.

The report, "School Choice by the Numbers: The Fiscal Effect of School Choice Programs, 1990-2006," was written by Susan Aud.

It was reviewed for the Think Twice think tank review project by Professor Bruce Baker of the University of Kansas.

TWELVE VOUCHER PROGRAMS STUDIED

In her report, Aud studied 12 programs that offer public subsidies for students who attend private schools in 10 states and the District of Columbia.

She compared the per pupil cost of public financing [state and local] for a student attending a public school to the public financing of a student using a voucher to attend a private school.

Based on this, she found a cumulative savings of \$444 million over a 15-year period nationwide.

In his review, Baker points out that expenditures and costs are not the same thing and that the report confuses "cost savings" with "government expenditure reduction."

THEY ARE CONFUSING THE FACTS

"Typically," he explains, "cost savings are defined in terms of achieving similar or better quality of outcome or output with lower investment. Cost necessarily assumes a level of product quality.

"Further, when one accounts for the cost of producing a product of specific quality, one must account for all resources that went into production, not just the small portion that was government subsidized."

The bottom line, Baker concludes, is that even if state and local governments were, in fact, able to reduce instructional expenses by \$444 million over 15 years, this is a minuscule figure.

The small number is in part because publicly financed vouchers are only used by 100,000 students which represents 0.2% of 2005 U.S. public school enrollment.

Using 2004-05 public education spending amounts, Baker calculates the pur-

ported savings to be the equivalent of less than 1/100th of one percent of annual public school spending, or about 60 cents per child per year.

Aud's evidence, Baker concludes, "does not make a sufficient case to informed policymakers for the positive fiscal impact of vouchers and tuition tax credits. In fact, it suggests quite the opposite – that fiscal gains are trivial at best."

You Want To Know Who Reads Papers?

The Wall Street Journal is read by the people who run the country.

The Washington Post is read by people who think they run the country.

The New York Times is read by people who think they should run the country and who are very good at crossword puzzles.

USA Today is read by people who think they ought to run the country but don't really understand The New York Times. They do, however, like their statistics shown in pie charts.

The Los Angeles Times is read by people who wouldn't mind running the country – if they could find the time, and didn't have to leave Southern California to do it.

The Boston Globe is read by people whose parents used to run the country and did a far superior job of it, thank you very much.

The New York Daily News is read by people who aren't too sure who's running the country and don't really care as long as they can get a seat on the train.

The New York Post is read by people who don't care who's running the country as long as they do something really scandalous, preferably while intoxicated.

The Miami Herald is read by people who are running another country but need the baseball scores.

The San Francisco Chronicle is read by people who aren't sure there is a country, or that anyone is running it; but if so, they oppose all that they stand for. There are occasional exceptions: if the leaders are handicapped, minority, feminist, atheist, dwarfs who also happen to be illegal aliens from any other country or galaxy, provided, of course, that they are not Republicans.

The National Enquirer is read by people trapped in line at the grocery store.

And, finally, our country is run by someone who doesn't read a newspaper at all.

Wal-Mart Hiring Ex-CIA, FBI Agents

By Michael Barbaro

The investigator flew to Guatemala in April 2002 with a delicate mission: trail a Wal-Mart manager around the country to prove he was sleeping with a lower-level employee, a violation of company policy.

The apparent smoking gun? "Moans and sighs" heard as the investigator, a Wal-Mart employee, pressed his ear against a hotel room door inside a Holiday Inn, according to legal documents.

Soon after, the company fired the manager for what it said was improper fraternization with a subordinate.

Over the last five years, Wal-Mart has assembled a team of former officials from the CIA, FBI and Justice Department whose elaborate, at times globe-trotting, investigations have led to the ouster of a high-profile board member who used company funds to buy hunting equipment.

TAPING TELEPHONE CALLS

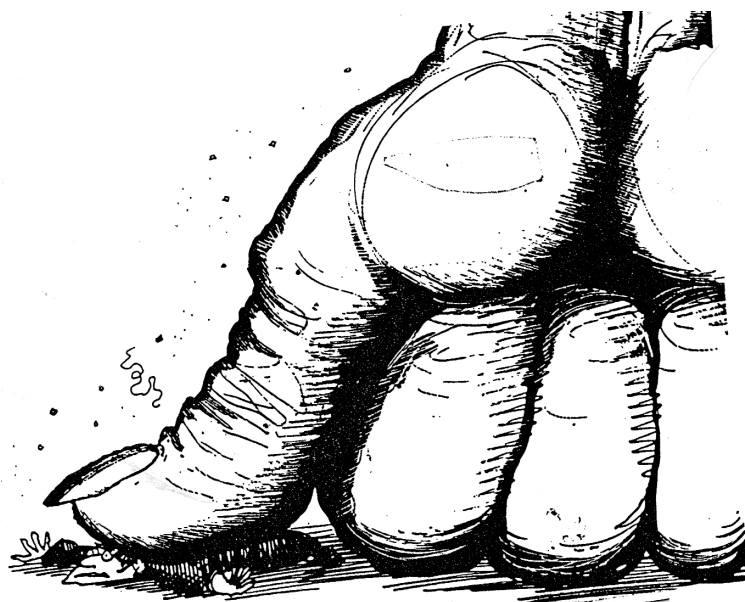
Also fired were two senior advertising executives who took expensive gifts from a potential supplier and a computer technician who taped a reporter's telephone calls.

Despite the retailer's folksy Arkansas image, few companies are as prickly or unforgiving about its employees' wayward behavior. It is a legacy of its frugal founder, Sam Walton, who equated misconduct with inefficiency that would cost customers money.

No case better demonstrates the company's prowess or its ruthlessness, former employees say, than the exhaustive investigation of Julie Roehm and Sean Womack, two former top Wal-Mart marketing executives.

After Roehm sued Wal-Mart for wrongful termination, the company disclosed the results of the investigation in a detailed and at times salacious countersuit.

Investigators obtained records that they said showed the two married execu-



tives had engaged in a sexual affair, accepted free meals from an advertising agency vying to win Wal-Mart's business and begun negotiating a deal to leave Wal-Mart to work for that agency.

INVESTIGATION STRIKING IN SCOPE

The Wal-Mart investigation was striking in its scope. Lawyers for Wal-Mart subpoenaed Womack's wife, Shelley, compelling her to give sworn testimony about how she discovered a sexual relationship between her husband and Roehm.

They prompted her to turn over dozens of embarrassing e-mail messages that her husband had sent to Roehm from a private account.

Wal-Mart investigators persuaded the top executives at a major advertising agency, Draft FCB, and its parent company, the Interpublic Group of Companies, to turn over hundreds of confidential e-mail messages, dinner receipts and notes from meetings.

Wal-Mart's investigative staff of roughly 400 check allegations of misconduct, guard Wal-Mart executives and prepare for potential crises of all kinds, from hurricanes to terrorist attacks. Wal-Mart employs 1.8 million workers.

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Chase-ing My Rewards Program To India

By Susan Estrich

It should have taken five minutes. OK, maybe 10. I got my latest bill from Chase Credit Cards, and it included two things I'd never noticed before. One was a fee for \$39, which was labeled my "Rewards Program Fee." I never knew Chase had a rewards program, much less one I paid a fee to participate in. I certainly don't remember signing up, or agreeing to another fee to encourage me to use their card.

There was also a "Flexible Rewards Summary," telling me that in addition to the 39 points I would get for paying the fee, I have thousands of old points that I never knew I had and must have accumulated over the 20-something years I've had a card from Chase.

Does that mean we get a new TV, my son asked hopefully.

Does that mean I get a vacation to somewhere, I thought hopefully.

I didn't have a clue, but in very little letters, the bill listed an 800 number to call to redeem my flexible rewards, plus a website where I could log on for 24-hour access to my rewards program.

FOLLOWING THE NOT-SO-FINE PRINT

Now, granted, I only have 17 years of education, and I've only been teaching law for 26 years. Oh, yes, and I live on my computer, aided by a 14-year-old prodigy who happens to be my son. So I actually thought I could handle this, at least with my son's assistance. How wrong can you be?

First, I tried the website. In order to get any information, I needed an access code. I have no access code. I'm one of those old-fashioned types who still write checks. My bad. I asked online for an access code. Sorry, they couldn't give me one because they didn't have my e-mail address. And I couldn't submit my e-mail address. In fact, I couldn't do anything.

Time to talk to a person. So I dialed the 800 number. After entering my account number and my zip code twice, and sitting on hold because of the huge volume of calls that must be coming in at 11 p.m. eastern time, I actually got a person on the phone.

Unfortunately for me, it was not an American person. We could barely understand each other. I tried speaking my clearest, the way I was taught to do when I used to read radio ads. No go. My request, which seemed simple to me [as in what's this rewards program, and how do I figure out which reward I'm eligible for], was beyond either his knowledge or understanding.

COMMENCING THE RUN-AROUND

Where are you, I asked him, before he transferred me to his colleague. There was a long pause. Chicago, he said. He didn't have a Midwestern drawl.

The next person was more honest. She needed my help spelling such tricky words as "law" in my e-mail address. That's a stumper. But at least she didn't lie. Where are you, I asked. India, she said. Where was the last man I talked to, the one who transferred me to you? India, she said. So why did he say he was in Chicago, I asked. Why did he lie?

Would you like to speak to a supervisor, she asked me. By now, half an hour had passed, my kids were getting ready for bed, and I was loaded for bear.

She transferred me to a supervisor, a Ms. Garcia in Texas. I explained the situation. We don't have a service center in Chicago, she told me. Obviously not, I said, you have one in India, with people who are not quite up to the job. But what really

got to me was the guy lying about where he was, covering up a practice of outsourcing that was turning a simple request into a ridiculous nightlong activity.

THE COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT DOESN'T EXIST

I would like to speak to someone about your employees lying about their whereabouts to cover up outsourcing, I said, in my firmest lawyer/syndicated columnist voice. Polite, but firm.

Her response was simple: NO.

No, I asked incredulously. Isn't there someone with whom I may discuss this endless waste of time abbreviated by a bold lie that might very well suggest a company policy to hide its outsourcing behind dishonest employees?

No, she said. There is no one you can talk to, no one you can write to, no one you can get in touch with. I'll make note of your complaint, and you may [not will] receive a letter from someone in three to five business days. Who will write that letter, I asked. Perhaps I could write to them first.

No, she said, you can't.

EVEN ANGRY COLUMNISTS CAN'T GET HELP

Now, I hate to do this, particularly when all I'm trying to do is figure out whether to pay the \$39 and whether I get anything worth \$39 if I do, but I was not happy. Listen, ma'am, I said, getting firmer by the moment, I'm a syndicated columnist. I'm sure I'm not alone in facing these problems, or in worrying about the losses and costs of outsourcing, and I plan to write about this tomorrow. Now, is there anyone I could speak to?

You know what she said? No.

And then we hung up. I tried entering the access code the second woman had given me, but that only got me to the page with my bill on it. I didn't even ask the next person where he was. Where is the list of rewards, I asked, for the fourth time. He told me. It took 30 seconds.

The rewards program, by the way, stinks. My toaster oven works just fine. You have to spend a fortune to get anything good. And believe me, that's one thing I have no plans of doing. Let them push their lies in India. I'm done.

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WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

For nearly 40 years, The Observer has been Oklahoma's only journal of free voices, providing news, analysis and commentary that can't be found in the state's lock-step, right-wing mainstream media. We've never wavered in our commitment to speak truth to power and to shine the spotlight on rank hypocrisy and public corruption.

But here's a truth we confront daily: We don't own the deep pockets of the Gaylords or the Lortons or the big national media chains. Our feisty journal relies on the generosity and support of its subscribers and small advertisers to keep challenging the status quo.

You can help ensure The Observer's future for generations by making us a part of your legacy and remembering us in your will. In return, we promise to continue delivering messages the silk-stocking elite don't want rank-and-file Oklahomans to receive. And to remain true to our motto: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

PUBLIC FORUM

Illegal Immigrants Posing Real Threat

By Charlie Daniels

I don't know how everybody else feels about it, but to me I think Hispanic people in this country, legally or illegally, made a huge public relations mistake with their recent demonstrations.

I don't blame anybody in the world for wanting to come to the United States of America, as it is a truly wonderful place. But when the first thing you do when you set foot on American soil is an illegal act, it is flat out wrong and I don't care how many la-la-land left heads come out of the woodwork and start trying to give me sensitivity lessons.

I don't need sensitivity lessons, in fact I don't have anything against Mexicans! I just have something against criminals and anybody who comes into this country illegally is a criminal and if you don't believe it try coming into America from a foreign country without a passport and see how far you get.

DEAL WITH IT, IT'S AN IN-YOUR-FACE ACTION

What disturbs me about the demonstrations is that it's tantamount to saying, "I am going to come into your country even if it means breaking your laws and there's nothing you can do about it."

It's an "in your face" action and speaking just for me I don't like it one little bit and if there were a half dozen pairs of gonads in Washington bigger than English peas it wouldn't be happening.

Where are you, you bunch of lily livered, pantywaist, forked tongued, sorry excuses for defenders of The Constitution? Have you been drinking the water out of the Potomac again?

And even if you pass a bill on immigration it will probably be so pork laden and watered down that it won't mean anything anyway. Besides, what good is another law going to do when you won't enforce the ones on the books now?

And what ever happened to the polls, guys? I thought you folks were the quint-essential finger-wetters. Well you sure ain't paying any attention to the polls this time because somewhere around 80% of Americans want something done about this mess, and mess it is and getting bigger everyday.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY TAKE TO THE STREETS?

This is no longer a problem, it is a dilemma and headed for being a tragedy. Do you honestly think that what happened in France with the Muslims can't happen here when the businesses who hire these people finally run out of jobs and a few million disillusioned Hispanics take to the streets?

If you, Mr. President, Congressmen and Senators, knuckle under on this and

Two Simple Solutions To Immigration Woes

By Kenny Belford

It seems every elected official in America has some kind of "immigration reform" proposal to address the unprecedented flood of illegal immigrants that are already here and arriving daily. It's become a hot topic during the presidential debates as well, with the camps sharply divided between those that support George W. Bush's amnesty program, and those that oppose it. However, there is consensus that this is a real and growing problem.

As a quick bit of background, let's remember this problem escalated to record proportions during the two terms of George W. Bush.

He refused to enforce the immigration laws already enacted, and repeatedly cut the budget of immigration and border patrols. His Republican pals that used to control both the Senate and Congress excused away his policies and now are faced with the aftermath.

THE SOLUTION IS SIMPLE

There is a solution to this problem. It's a simple solution. It's an obvious solution. It doesn't require any great expenditure of our tax dollars. It's a solution that will work.

Before I make this complex issue simple, we need to understand that, while this is called an "immigration" issue, it's really a Mexican issue. We're not being flooded with Canadians sneaking across the border. It's Mexicans.

We can all understand why. If you're a willing worker and can only earn around \$200 a month in Mexico, or you can sneak across the border and earn \$800-plus a month in America, what would you do to support your family?

So there lies the solution. It's two-fold. First, we can pass a law that requires property owners that rent and lease residential units to determine legal status before allowing someone to move in. To insure compliance, simply create a fine that really stings. Something in the range of \$25,000 per infraction should do it. That's step one. If a Mexican sneaks in, there is no place to live. Then there's the issue of jobs. That's why they come here.

HOLD EMPLOYERS ACCOUNTABLE

We can pass a second law, much stronger than the ones already on the books, making the hiring of illegal immigrants a serious matter. Again, hitting the pocketbook of violators is the surest way to gain compliance. A fine of \$50,000 per illegal worker would make hiring them a risk most companies wouldn't want to continue.

If a company is found to have five or more illegal immigrants on their payroll, then a criminal charge against the CEO - that carries a mandatory one-year sen-



refuse to do something meaningful it means that you care nothing for the kind of country your children and grandchildren will inherit.

But I guess that doesn't matter as long as you get re-elected. Shame on you.

One of the big problems in America today is that if you have the nerve to say anything derogatory about any group of people [except Christians] you are going to be screamed at by the media and called a racist, a bigot and anything else they can think of to call you.

Well I've been pounded by the media before and I'm still rockin' and rollin' and when it comes to speaking the truth I fear not.

POLITICIANS ABOUT TO SELL OUT THE USA

The truth is that the gutless, gonadless, milksop politicians are just about to sell out the United States of America because they don't have the intestinal fortitude to stand up to the face reality.

Reality is that we would never allow any other group of people to have 12 million illegals in this country and turn around and say, "Oh, it's OK, ya'll can stay here if you'll just allow us to slap your wrist."

And I know that some of you who read this column are saying, "Well what's

See THREAT Page 18

tence for each illegal employee - should be a sobering concern.

Two simple steps. If someone sneaks across the border, there is no place to live. If someone sneaks across the border there are no jobs.

The problem is, the Americans that are profiting from illegal immigrants by renting housing and using them for cheap labor would rise in protest if these measures came up for debate.

So who do you think the real culprits are?

- The author lives in Tulsa

The Unattractive Choice That Is Facing America

By Froma Harrop

"Which Side Are You On?" was the great labor song of the 1930s. The question in its title remains relevant in today's immigration debate. Back then, the two sides - the union or thugs from the mining company - made for an easy selection. Now, workers have to choose between their own economic security and mass immigration, which their unions simply opposed in the past.

The new options are more painful because today's immigrants, legal or otherwise, are mostly good, hard-working people and potential union members. But the law of labor supply and demand states - and history confirms - that wages and union power fall in times of high immigration.

The issue causes political vertigo as diversity liberals and cheap-labor Republicans combine to oppose cultural conservatives and poor blacks. In recent decades, organized labor's official stance has moved toward the open-borders position.

Vernon Briggs has been hacking through this confusion for a long time. A labor-relations expert at Cornell University, Briggs is a pro-union Democrat. He recently told the House immigration subcommittee that the ongoing flood of workers into the United States hurts organized labor. This puts him at variance with many of today's union leaders, though not their predecessors.

"Historically, the labor movement has been able to distinguish between the immigrant agenda and the agenda for American workers," Briggs told me. "It's

See CHOICE Page 18

Labor Unions' Clout In Presidential Race

By Ellen Wulforst

With a weakened Republican president and Democrats given a solid chance to win, U.S. labor unions see next year's presidential election as a chance to revive their clout, experts and activists say.

Unions have been energized by the 2006 election, which produced a Democratic-controlled Congress, and by the approaching end of the administration of Republican President George W. Bush, who fought their key initiatives as the Iraq war hurt his popularity.

"The labor movement is in a powerful position now," said Gordon Lafer, labor expert at the University of Oregon. "There's a large number of people who are very angry and very highly motivated."

The Democratic presidential contenders, who court unions far more than do business-oriented Republicans, are vying to win labor's backing in the November 2008 election.

MAJOR PLAYERS WOOING LABOR

Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack Obama, Joseph Biden and Chris Dodd, former Sen. John Edwards, Rep. Dennis Kucinich and New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson have been talking recently to unions, including the AFL-CIO federation, fire fighters and the International Association of Machinists.

"Labor is on the offense now, so you hear some of the presidential candidates really talking up labor issues more so than in 2004," said Peter Francia, author of *The Future of Organized Labor in American Politics*.

Activists say labor lost ground under Bush in efforts to organize workers, improve workplace safety and curb outsourcing of jobs overseas.

A White House veto threat hangs over a top item on labor's agenda - legislation to simplify organizing by letting workers form unions with signed cards rather than the current secret ballot, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives in March but faces opposition in the narrowly divided Senate.

NEVADA'S PRIMARY COULD BOOST LABOR

Pro-labor Democrats say Nevada, a relatively strong union state slated to move up its primary to an early date, could boost labor's influence in the campaigns.

Seventeen percent of Nevada workers are represented by unions, higher than the nation's 12% rate, according to government statistics.

The U.S. rate is far lower than in European Union countries, where union membership ranges from roughly 11% in Portugal to 84% in Denmark.

"I am optimistic that we can elect a president who cares about working people," said Bruce Raynor, head of UNITE HERE, which represents 60,000 workers in Nevada.

THREAT

From Page 17

wrong with that?"

I'll tell you what's wrong with it. These people could be from Mars as far as we know. We don't know who they are, where they are or what they're up to and the way the Congress is going we're not going to.

Does this make sense? Labor force, you say? We already subsidize corporate agriculture as it is, must we subsidize their labor as well?

If these people were from Haiti would we be so fast to turn a blind eye to them or if they were from Somalia or Afghanistan? I think not.

All the media shows us are pictures of hard working Hispanics who have crossed the border just to try to better their life.

WHAT THE MEDIA ISN'T SHOWING YOU

They don't show you pictures of the Feds rounding up members of MS-13, the violent gang who came across the same way the decent folks did. They don't tell you about the living conditions of the Mexican illegal some fat-cat hired to pick his crop.

I want to make two predictions.

No. 1: This situation is going to grow and fester until it erupts into violence on our streets while the wimps in Washington drag their toes in the dirt and try to figure how many tons of political hay they can make to the acre.

No. 2: Somebody is going to cross that border with some kind of weapon of mass destruction and set it off in a major American city after which there will be a backlash such as this country has never experienced and the Capitol building in Washington will probably tilt as congressmen and senators rush to the other side of the issue!

I don't know about you but I would love to see just one major politician stand up and say, "I don't care who I make mad and I don't care how many votes I lose; this is a desperate situation and I'm going to lead the fight to get it straightened out."

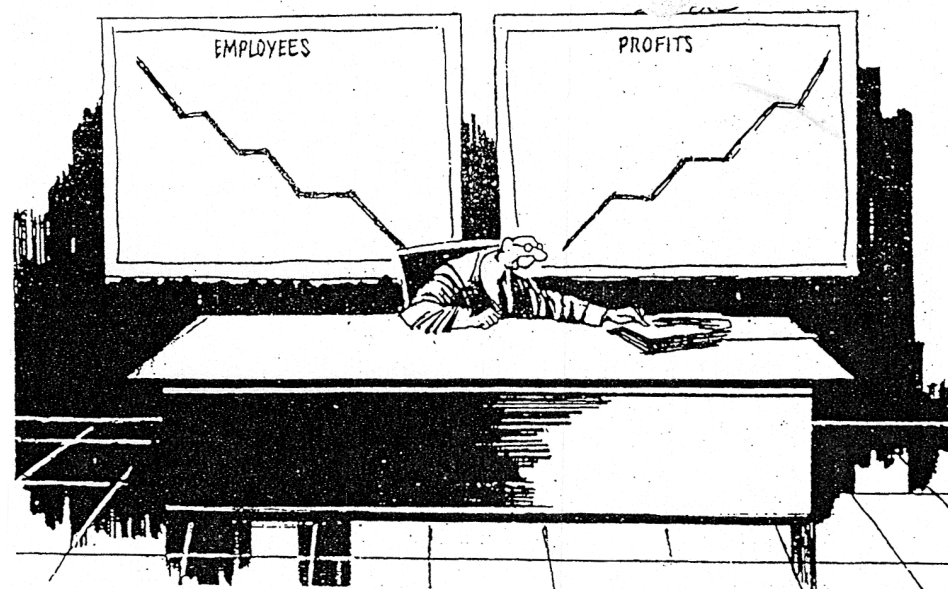
I don't blame anybody for wanting to come to America, but if you don't respect our immigration laws why would you respect any others?

And by the way, this is America and our flag has stars and stripes! Please get that other one out of my face!

God Bless America!

Editor's Note: We said it before - the only way to deal with this crisis is with a guest-worker program that our gutless Congress won't enact. Bush is right for a change.

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"ASK ACCOUNTING HOW MANY MORE LAYOFFS WE NEED TO ROUND OFF MY BONUS TO \$2 MILLION..."

"Income inequality and health care and retirement insecurity and job insecurity are so pronounced in the minds of most Americans," Raynor said. "The candidates are more attuned to the interests of workers than in many years."

LABOR'S ENTHUSIASM IS REMARKABLE

At the 10 million-member AFL-CIO, "There is the greatest level of enthusiasm heading into '08 than I've seen in many, many years," said political director Karen Ackerman.

Organized labor is planning candidate and issue forums and drives to register voters and get them to the polls. Some make heavy campaign contributions and influential endorsements, and political strategists consider unions expert at mobilizing volunteers.

U.S. union membership has declined for decades, but its influence is large, experts say. One in four voters in 2004 belonged to a union household. By a 2-to-1 margin, unionized voters backed Democrat John Kerry's failed bid for the presidency in 2004, when U.S. organized labor spent heavily in an effort to unseat Bush.

But for 2008, even opponents say unions have a stronger hand.

"Is there a better chance that a Democrat gets elected next time? Sure, probably, I think that's fair to say," said Doug Stafford of the National Right to Work Committee. "It's hard to look at the poll numbers of the current administration and say anything else."

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CHOICE

From Page 17

traditionally pushed for the agenda that favored American workers, even though many of them were immigrants."

Samuel Gompers, who founded the American Federation of Labor, was himself an immigrant [English-born of a Dutch Jewish family]. But Gompers did not hesitate to oppose the then-enormous inflow of foreign workers from Europe. "We immediately realized that immigration is, in its fundamental aspects, a labor problem," he said in 1892.

The AFL-CIO passionately supported the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, particularly the part calling for fines against employers who hire illegal workers. [Its demand for a counterfeit-proof system to verify eligible workers was cut in the final bill.]

Thereafter, labor leaders started to cave on immigration. The AFL-CIO made little fuss when the Immigration Act of 1990 raised the number of legal visas by 35% to about 700,000 a year. At its 1993 convention, members passed a resolution that accused immigration-reform advocates of launching "a new hate campaign" that made immigrants "the scapegoats for economic and social problems."

Why the about-face? The unions figured that the federal government wasn't going to control immigration so they might as well try to organize the newcomers. Problem is, the swelling tide of new labor competition has undermined their ability to improve the workers' lot.

"I'm in favor of unions," Briggs said, "but it's more than getting people as union members. It means doing something for them."

And it's true that recent "victories" in unionizing low-skilled workers have produced paltry gains. For example, the Service Employees International Union managed to organize janitors in Los Angeles, but Briggs notes, "at wages way below what they were back in the 1970s." The strange part is that Los Angeles' janitors were highly unionized [and mostly African-American] until the '70s, when a surge in illegal immigration destroyed their bargaining power.

The union last year organized janitors in Houston. For all these efforts, this largely Hispanic workforce saw its pay rise from a pitiful \$5.25 an hour to a pathetic \$6.25 - which is lower than the minimum wage in 21 states and the District of Columbia. Wages in the contract's later years will barely exceed the new federal minimum.

This is an unattractive chore, but the American people have to choose sides. It's either continued massive immigration or providing relief to their downwardly mobile workers. They can't have both.

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GOP Hopefuls Duck Service In Military

By Maureen Dowd

Be honest. Who would you rather share a foxhole with: A gay soldier or Mitt Romney?

A gay soldier, of course. In a dicey situation like that you need someone steadfast who knows who he is and what he believes, even if he's not allowed to say it out loud.

Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue, as the gloriously gay Oscar Wilde said. And gays are the sacrifice that hypocritical Republican candidates offer to placate "values" voters - even though some candidates are not so finicky about morals regarding their own affairs and divorces.

They may coo over the photo of Dick Cheney, whose re-election campaign demonized gays, proudly smiling with his new grandson, the first baby of his lesbian daughter, Mary.

But they'll hold the line, by jiminy, against gay Americans who are willing to die or be horribly disfigured in the cursed Bush/Cheney war in Iraq.

GENERAL PACE SAID GAYS ARE IMMORAL

Peter Pace, whose job as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff became a casualty of Iraq, asserted in March that homosexual acts "are immoral."

Yet in May, he wrote a letter to the judge in the Scooter Libby case, pleading for leniency for the Cheney aide. Scooter always looked for "the right way to proceed - both legally and morally," General Pace wrote of the man who lied to a grand jury about the outing of a spy, after he pumped up the fake case for the war that has claimed the lives of 3,500 young men and women serving under the general.

At the GOP debate in New Hampshire, the contenders were more homophobic than the mobsters on "The Sopranos," unanimously supporting the inane "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

RUDY'S ANTEDILUVIAN ANSWER

Even Rudy Giuliani, who loves to cross-dress and who stayed with old friends, a gay couple, to avoid Gracie Mansion when his second marriage was disintegrating, had an antediluvian answer.

Wolf Blitzer asked him about the Arabic linguists trained by the government who have been ousted from the military after being outed.

Giuliani, who procured three deferments to avoid Vietnam, replied that, with the war in Iraq raging, "This is not the time to deal with disruptive issues like this."

If he's so concerned with disruptive issues, maybe he should start worrying about this one: Two straight guys who slithered out of going to Vietnam are devising a losing strategy in Iraq year after year.

W. and Dick Cheney have fouled things up so badly that Robert Gates and Tony Snow are now pointing to South Korea - where American troops have stayed for over half a century - as a model.

Mitt Romney agreed with Rudy on the issue. Instead of going to Vietnam, Rom-

Mormons Wary Of Closer Investigation

By Laurie Goodstein

LOGAN, UT - In this wide valley where the twin spires of the Mormon temple dominate the landscape and some neighborhoods have a Mormon chapel every few blocks, Mitt Romney's bid for President is both a proud sign of progress and a cause of trepidation.

Many Mormons here are rooting for Romney, a fellow church member whose success in business, good looks and wholesome family tableau seem to them to present the ideal face of Mormonism to the world.

Among the Republican front-runners, Romney, former governor of Massachusetts, recently was the leader in campaign fund-raising. His candidacy is, for many Mormons, a historic moment of arrival.

Even for the many Mormons who support Romney, the moment is fraught with anxiety because his candidacy is bringing intense scrutiny to their church, and could exacerbate long-standing criticism.

LONG FIGHT FOR LEGITIMACY

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as the Mormon Church is called, has been fighting for legitimacy since its founding 177 years ago in upstate New York.

The church's first prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., was killed by a mob in Illinois and his followers fled from persecution and settled in Utah.

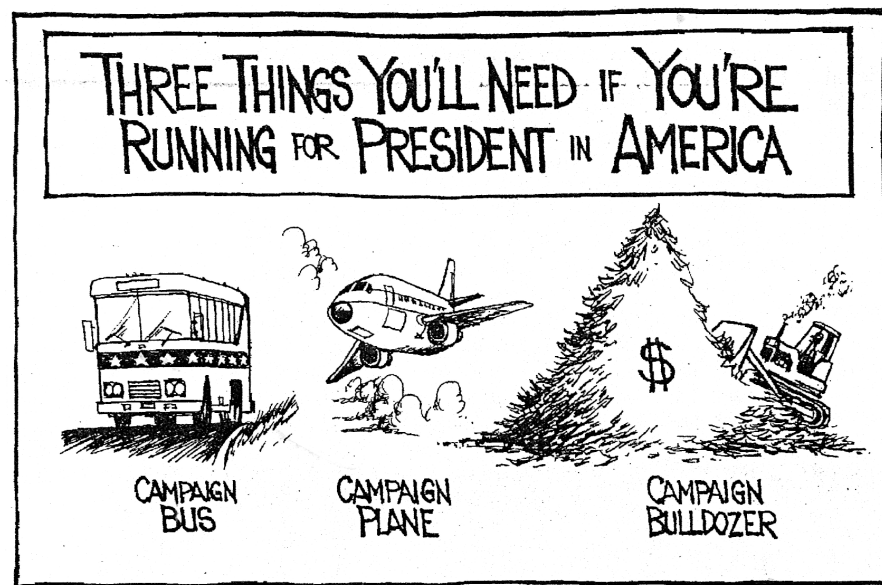
At the core of these tensions is that Mormons consider themselves to be Christians who believe in Jesus Christ and the Bible, but many of their tenets and practices have been denounced by other churches as heretical.

Romney has been questioned about the Mormon definition of God, polygamy, the location of Jesus' arrival when he returns to earth, and even a mysterious saying attributed to Joseph Smith Jr. called the "White Horse Prophecy," which some interpret as a prediction that when the American Constitution is hanging "by a thread," a Mormon will rescue the nation.

ROMNEY POLITICS UPSETS SOME MORMONS

Romney's tendency to gloss over Mormonism's history and distinctive tenets has upset some fellow Mormons. Some said they cringed when Romney said on 60 Minutes, "I can't imagine anything more awful than polygamy."

Another case arose when George Stephanopoulos of ABC News asked Romney about a Mormon teaching that Jesus will come to the U.S. when he returns to



ney spent two and a half years doing Mormon missionary work in France. Isn't that like doing Peace Corps work in Monte Carlo?

MCCAIN WANTS GAY TROOPS CLOSETED

At the memorial for Mark Bingham, the gay 6-foot-5 rugby player who was on Flight 93 on 9/11, John McCain said he might owe his life to the young man who helped fight the hijackers, bringing down the plane aiming to crash into the Capitol.

But Sen. McCain wants gay troops to stay closeted. The policy, he said, is "working." But it's not. The Army in Iraq is like that exhausted nag Scarlett O'Hara whipped on to Tara. Yet Republicans surge on, even as they expel gays.

In a Times Op-Ed piece, Stephen Benjamin, a gay Arabic translator eager to go to Iraq, told how he was dismissed when the Navy learned his status.

"Consider," he wrote. "More than 58 Arabic linguists have been kicked out since 'don't ask, don't tell' was instituted. How much valuable intelligence could those men and women be providing today to troops in harm's way?"

11,000 HAVE BEEN BOOTED FROM ARMY

He noted that 11,000 other service members have been shoved out since 1993 and speculated that if the Army had not been so short of Arabic translators, the cables that went untranslated on Sept. 10, 2001, might have been translated, preventing 9/11.

In 2000, the British military began letting anyone who served say if they were "a poof," as one squadron leader put it.

Sarah Lyall wrote in The Times that the military reports that none of its fears "about harassment, discord, blackmail, bullying or an erosion of unit cohesion or military effectiveness have come to pass."

America has been Will-and-Graced since Bill Clinton had his kerfuffle on the issue in 1993. Tolerance has blossomed, especially among younger Americans. According to a Pew poll, 4-in-10 Americans say they have close friends or relatives who are gay.

The Republican field seems stale and out of sync. They should have listened to the inimitable Barry Goldwater, who told it true: You don't have to be straight to shoot straight.

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reign on earth. Romney responded that the Messiah will return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, "the same as the other Christian tradition."

While Mormons tend to be conservative on social issues, Romney has taken some positions that are more conservative than those of his own church.

Mormon teaching allows abortion in cases of rape, incest and severe fetal defects, and to protect the health of the mother.

The church has no position on embryonic stem cell research. Romney has in the last few years changed his long held positions to embrace an anti-abortion, anti-stem cell research, anti-gay agenda.

SOME DISMAYED BY HIS PANDERING

Some Mormons said in interviews that they were dismayed that he appeared to be both pandering to the right and compromising his integrity.

In a poll of Mormons in Utah by Dan E. Jones, a Utah pollster, 62% said they would vote for Romney. Mormons make up about two-thirds of voters in Utah, and 59% of them are Republicans.

In contrast to some denominations where political endorsements are a staple of sermons, the Mormon Church avoids preaching politics from the pulpit, and routinely reminds local leaders of this before elections.

Romney is not the first Mormon to run for president; he is following in the footsteps of his father, George W. Romney.

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