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## Counterfeit Patriots Outed Freedom's Price

By Frosty Troy

*"Are we not the same people who worked, prayed, planned and dreamed of a country where the idea of freedom was in the national conscience, and dignity was part of the national framework?" – Maya Angelou*

The 56 colonists who signed the Declaration of Independence could hardly have foreseen the results of their action.

The British were so disdainful of the puny little document that the London Morning Post gave it a six-line mention beneath a theatrical notice.

The British Crown posted a \$2,500 reward for names of the signers. The signing was declared to be an act of treason, punishable by death by hanging. For that reason it was almost a year later that the names of the signers were made public.

They voted to have the Declaration engrossed on parchment, and it was signed on Aug. 2, 1776.

One man, Charles Carroll, wanted King George to know exactly where to send the hangman. He wrote his hometown after his name, Carrollton.

He was willing to give his life for the cause of freedom. Compare those brave souls to today's counterfeit patriots waging a war based on lies.

The White House is led by a man who dodged combat by hiding out in the Air National Guard. He was even AWOL there. "Mission accomplished?"

Many of the flag wavers are devoid of honor, waging a propaganda campaign to mislead Americans.

Consider flag wavers whose children are exempt but who celebrate that "so few" of our fighting men and women are being killed or wounded since the surge began. Over 4,000 dead and counting.

Yes, honorable men and women may oppose the war and still support the troops. Public outcry ended the Vietnam tragedy.

Leading the war parade has been Rush Limbaugh who dodged service because he had a cyst on his butt. Once it was taken care of, political influence played a role when the local draft board didn't call him back.

Among the chickenhawks are men

such as Bill Bennett, draft deferred. Pat Buchanan had a bad knee. Dick Cheney said he had "other priorities." Bill O'Reilly, Tony Snow and P.J. O'Rourke are fervent hawks but not passionate enough to serve.

At least Buchanan has seen the error of his ways and calls for an exit strategy.

One of the earliest supporters of invading Iraq was House Speaker Newt Gingrich who claimed a college waiver. The National Rifle Association's Wayne LaPierre didn't serve, nor did motormouth Chris Matthews.

Closer to home, to beat the draft, Don Nickles cleverly enlisted in a Kansas National Guard unit that had already rotated out of Vietnam.

Before Pat Robertson was a televangelist, he was claiming religious immunity. George Will was exempt be-

cause he was in divinity school.

John Ashcroft was teaching in college and Gary Bauer had an education waiver. Ken Starr had psoriasis.

Few have been as willing as Fox News to send our military to death, limbless or PTSD – a network founded by Roger Ailes who avoided Vietnam.

Don't forget Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who opted out because he had too many children. Ben Stein was busy in law school and Justice Clarence Thomas was eligible but wasn't called and didn't join.

Someone please ask conservative columnist Fred Barnes why he didn't serve but continues to beat the pro-Bush drums of war on network TV talk shows.

Chickenhawks date to Ronald Reagan who skipped World War II by making stateside propaganda films for the

War Department. John Wayne had medical problems[!].

In the Declaration the signers attested, "And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

The Declaration of Independence didn't start the war of revolution. Fighting between British troops and the colonists had been going on for over a year.

Not unlike Iraq, frustrating and bloody revolutionary war followed, and though the defeat at Yorktown in 1781 marked the end of Britain's ability to wage war successfully, the last British troops did not leave American soil until November 1783.

John McCain, a decorated Vietnam veteran, said America will stay in Iraq "100 years if that is what it takes." He said not enough troops were sent but he backs Bush on the war "100%."

None of us can fully comprehend what must have gone through the minds of American patriots who had courage enough to sign a treasonous document in order to push an apathetic citizenry toward freedom of thought and conscience.

Historians note that a majority of colonists remained loyal to the Crown – just as America's unwashed bow down to King George Bush.

They did it not only from a sense of responsibility, but eagerly.

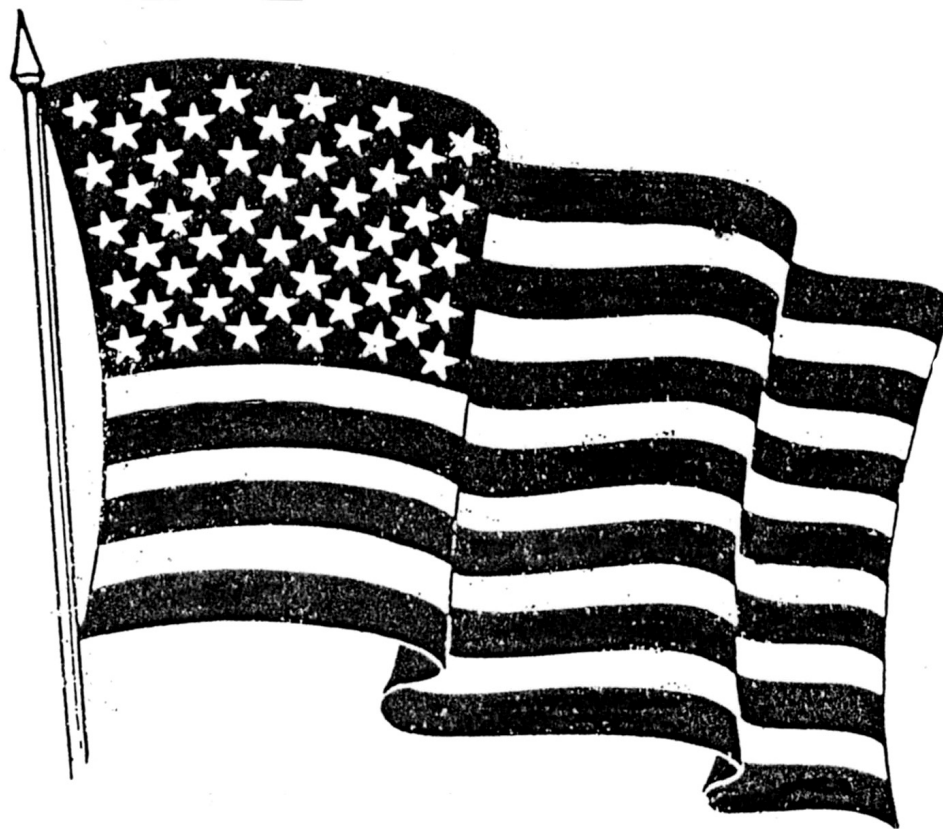
Several who were not present when the Declaration of Independence was adopted, however, asked permission to sign it on Aug. 2 when the parchment was completed.

Those men took the first step that gave us a great nation – unlike any other in the world. Yet today we see those hard-won freedoms crumbling, now considered by the rest of the world a "rogue state."

We learn not from critics but White House insiders that the free press we enjoy was complicit in taking America to a war that has lasted longer than World War II.

Being "imbedded with the troops"

See COUNTERFEIT Page 19



# Observations

## Feds Speak

The Feds have told Oklahoma's Mental Health agency that it cannot use \$2.5 million of a federal grant balance of more than \$5.4 million for a brain scan machine.

The Feds told the agency that if it doesn't live up to the original intent of the grant, the balance could be canceled.

The Observer has taken heat from mental health contractors over our May 10 cover story in which we challenged the use of the \$13.5 million in grant money.

Karina Forrest, director of the Oklahoma chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, said two-thirds of those needing treatment are not getting it.

That's where every available dollar should be targeted.

## Theocracy?

The Oklahoma Observer defends the separation of church and state for a good reason – it's in the Constitution and George W. Bush has sought to erase it.

Millions of your tax dollars are going to organizations and programs that should not be tolerated.

Americans United cites just a few in recent months earmarked by the White House:

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

These may be worthy programs, but at what cost? When the line between church and state is blurred, no matter how well intentioned, it's only a matter of time before the Republican base – 30 million fundamentalists – attempt to transform this nation into a theocracy.

Wild speculation? Hardly. It is already a road well traveled to the tune of hundreds of millions of your tax dollars during the Bush regime.

## Big Bad Bill

We thought the Legislature was well rid of Rep. Bill Graves, a Republican homophobe whose ears are bookends for a vacuum.

We thought Graves had found a home as Oklahoma County district judge because he can practically cite the Constitution by heart.

Now he's up to his old tricks, opposing the American Bar Association and the Oklahoma Bar Association anti-discrimination statement.

Discrimination is wrong, wrong, wrong whether it is based on gender, race or sexual preference.

We hope the ABA and OBA simply ignore him and his letter of protest.

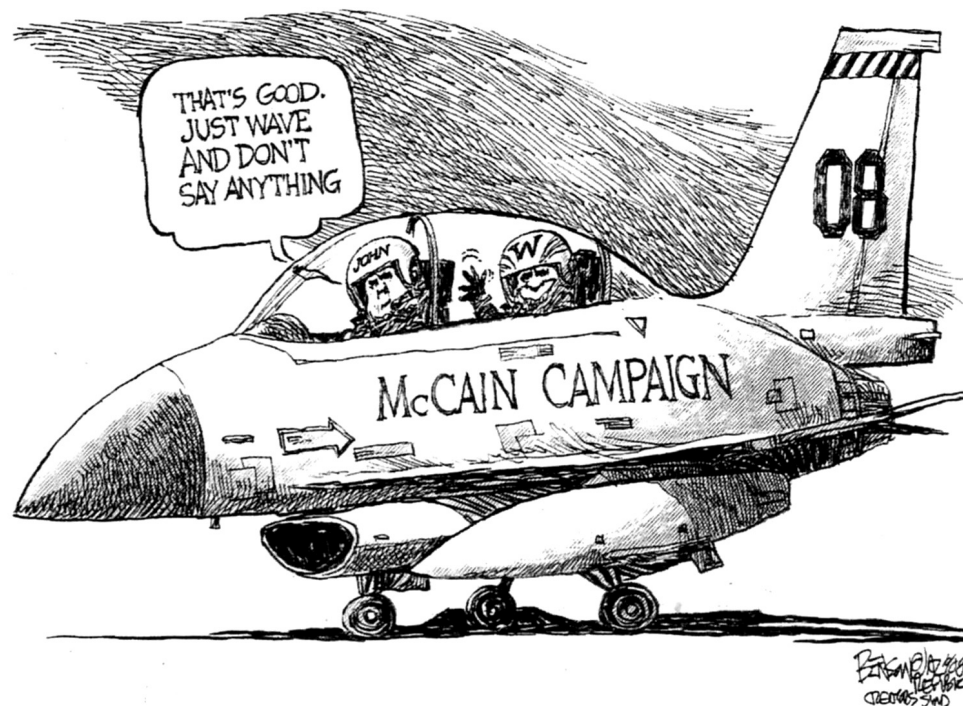
## Merit Pay?

You know public education faces problems with Barack Obama when he wins praise from the far right Reason Foundation.

They question his proposed \$10 billion for early childhood education [a field in which Oklahoma is a national leader] but they love his call for merit pay for teachers.

Obama has signed the Reason Foundation's "Oath of Presidential Transparency," promising the most transparent and fiscally accountable executive branch in history.

This is from the foundation's web page: "He's also wisely argued in favor of merit pay for teachers and charter



schools, telling Politico, 'I've consistently said we need to support charter schools. I think it is important to experiment, by looking at how we can reward excellence in the classroom.'

He does not favor merit pay based on test scores. Some of his positions on education issues, such as his stance on charters, break from traditional Democratic Party positions.

He wants to reform No Child Left Behind, but John McCain supports it, plus merit pay and vouchers.

Public educators have no problem with charter schools when they meet standards adhered to by public schools.

Merit pay is a naked attempt to kill collective bargaining and favor a handful of teachers over all the rest. National Board Certification and mentor teacher programs already reward the best and brightest.

With five months to go, maybe someone will help Obama see the light.

## Go Jim Go

We don't often have kind words for Oklahoma's Republican senior Sen. Jim Inhofe, but his action to help stop using corn for fuel is worthy of plaudits.

Not only has the price of corn doubled, it is immoral to use a food product when millions around the world go to bed hungry.

Inhofe has called on Congress to repeal the recently passed mandate for more ethanol. Naturally those growing corn are outraged because they are enjoying record profits.

What happens when seed is priced sky high? What is happening to food prices in America and across the world? What about the people of Africa dying for lack of food?

An already bad situation is made worse by recent flooding in the Midwest that threatens to destroy much of this year's corn crop.

We need alternative fuels such as that based on switchgrass, but food products ought to be out of the question.

## Barr Disgusted

As a Georgia congressman Bob Barr was definitely not a libertarian but shared some of their views. Now he's the Libertarian Party's presidential nominee.

In an appearance on the Colbert Re-

port on the Comedy Channel, he was witty and direct in his answers: He didn't leave the Republican Party, it left him.

Bush is an all-time disastrous big spender.

As a strong conservative, it took a particularly awful Republican president for Barr to make the connections between the abuses of power he liked and the abuses of power he didn't.

The Libertarian party, which hasn't won more than 1% of the presidential vote since 1980, has a lot to gain from Barr's run.

If they were honest, Barr's old colleagues – people who you'll see turning purple and denouncing him if it looks like he takes votes from John McCain – would make the same connections that he has.

## New GI Bill

On July 4th the nation will join its nearly 24 million veterans in remembering the American heroes who have lost their lives in war.

The Senate honored U.S. troops by passing a 21st Century GI Bill, expanding educational benefits for veterans who joined the service after Sept. 11, 2001.

It is time for those who have been calling on these brave men and women to serve again and again to assist in providing a meaningful chance for a first-class future.

Seventy-five senators voted to fund veterans, providing a veto-proof majority.

Yet not only did Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, not vote for the bill, he didn't even show up to vote.

Only other senators missing were Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-CA, for health reasons, and Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, who said he had to attend a funeral.

The other Oklahoma senator, Jim Inhofe, flip-flopped on the issue, first endorsing it, then opposing it under pressure from McCain and the White House.

In the past McCain has promised to "do everything" in his power to look after the nation's military.

But a look at his record on veterans issues shows that he has unfortunately favored conservative pandering instead.

Surely America won't go for McCain, who is Bush lite.

Another eight years of a White House devoid of integrity may be more than the country can bear.

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

# Observerscope

Democrats don't need any enemies when they elect the likes of Jeff McMahan, now the former state auditor and inspector.

Dart: To the OKC Chamber, selling voters on buying the GM plant, then subsidizing and turning it over to Tinker Air Force Base. It will cost Mid-Del Schools \$2 million a year in lost property taxes.

Congressman Dan Boren has entered the hospital to have splinters removed from his derriere. He acquired them by riding the fence. As a super-delegate he refused to endorse Barack Obama despite Obama's victory.

Laurel: To Ron Nesser for this gem: A Republican found a magic Genie's lamp and rubbed it. The Genie said, "I will grant you one wish." The Republican said, "I wish I were smarter." So the Genie turned him into a Democrat.

The departure of ex-GOP Speaker Lance Cargill from the Legislature bids farewell to one of the most incompetent, brutally partisan legislators we have ever covered.

Dart: To Senate Co-Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, for his op-ed piece in the Daily Disappointment saying no agency took a cut this session. Wrong! With a standstill budget and inflation running 2.9%, virtually all took a cut.

OU President David Boren, in his book *Letter to America*, wants the full benefits Social Security age raised to 66 or 67. That's easy for him to say. The Retirement Board calculates his full retirement at \$300,000 a year. Whew!

Laurel: To a group of veterans who have posted a film on the Internet saying Sen. Jim Inhofe's ad is a lie - he voted against armor and health benefits for troops. Go to bravenewfilm.org or check it out on YouTube.

When you consider soaring gasoline prices, consider this injunction: The meek shall inherit the earth but the strong will retain the mineral rights.

Dart: To Rep. George Faught, R-Muskogee, for voting against removing the sales tax from food but voted for a sales tax exemption for gold and rare coins. [From a clever ad in the Muskogee Phoenix]

Gov. Brad Henry deserves applause for his veto of the so-called Religious Viewpoints Antidiscrimination Act. Authored by tuiti fruiti Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, it would have mired schools in innumerable lawsuits.

Laurel: To Sen. Harry Coates, R-Seminole, whose attack on the immigration bill [HB 1804] as unconstitutional brought him much grief but total federal court vindication. The panders should have listened.

The 2008 legislative session saw 26 bills introduced to create new felony crimes. The Legislature added more years to 11 felony statutes; five bills increased court costs and fines, nine bills created new misdemeanor crimes.

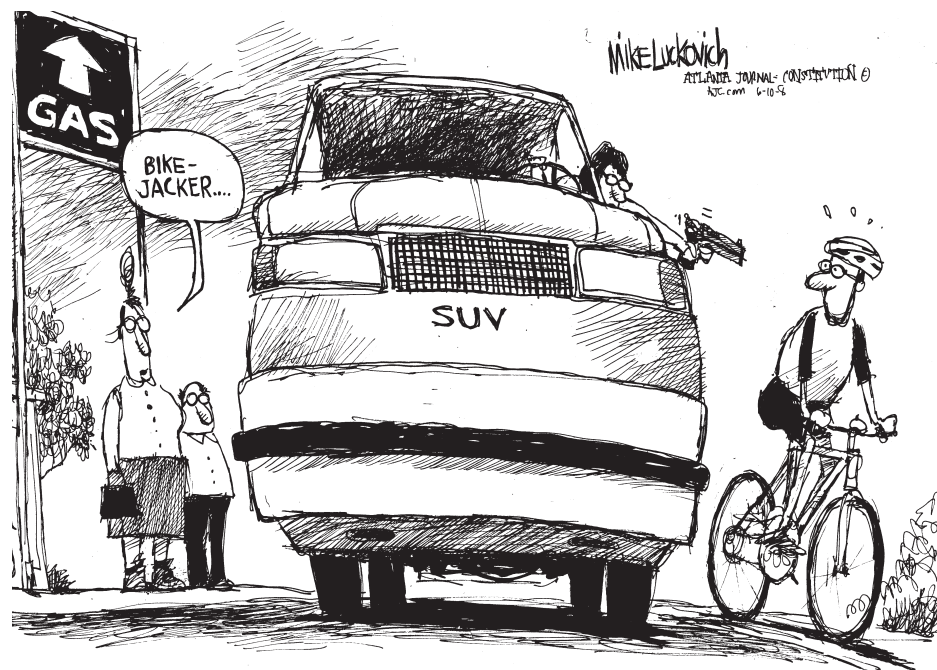
Dart: To State Treasurer Scott Meacham for raiding the Tobacco Trust for over \$100 million to finance other programs.

We're adding \$3,000 a second to the national debt, squandering billions in Iraq while in developing countries 91 children out of 1,000 die before their fifth birthday.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's 52 drug courts which are not only redeeming lives but saving taxpayers millions in incarceration costs.

"The president and the secretary of defense would not assert as plainly and bluntly as they have that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction if it was not true and if they did not have a solid basis for saying it." - Bush Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, Dec. 5, 2002.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment editorial page for continually publishing rightwing hack Brandon Dutcher's attacks on public education. He's a homeschooler who wants your tax dollars for that unregulated system.



GOP Sen. Jim Inhofe's ads are hysterical. After fighting the superfund Tar Creek buyout for years, he's now taking credit for it.

Laurel: To the last-minute battle of Reps. Ryan McMullen and Ryan Kiesel to save all of Oklahoma's rural driver's license testing sites. The state had proposed reducing testing sites from 59 to 27.

Let's all hear it for West Virginia where the Supreme Court nailed Chesapeake in a \$404.3 million lawsuit. Chesapeake instantly canceled plans for a \$35 million regional office there. West Virginia, unlike Oklahoma, is not for sale.

Dart: To Dana Murphy, Republican running for the Corporation Commission, "renting" office space at \$50 a month from Marlin Oil Co., whose boss has donated \$5,000 to her.

"When Bush tries to articulate a vision, he will butcher the Gettysburg Address. Obama will make an A&P grocery list sing." - GOP Rep. Tom Davis.

Laurel: To the world's scientists for slapping Ben Stein's new anti-global warming so-called documentary. It's not a matter of opinion - he flat-out lies in it.

Barring a miracle, look for the 2009 Legislature to tap the \$571 million Rainy Day Fund. Those pandering huge tax breaks for the affluent are coming home to haunt Oklahoma.

Dart: to the sloping skulls in the Legislature for including \$50,000 in the Ethics Commission budget as down payment on a \$1 million software program that doesn't interface with the existing program. The governor vetoed it.

If Republicans take over both houses of the 2009 Legislature, look for the proposed so-called Office of Accountability and Innovation to be revived. It would have butchered state agencies in this revenue shortfall year had the governor not vetoed it.

Laurel: To some of the Observer's outstanding Oklahoma heroes, our public defenders - low pay, long hours, fantastic dedication. Assistant public defenders have as many as 1,000 kids on their caseloads.

Oops! No sooner had Senate Co-Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, asserted that Oklahoma is "an unfriendly business environment" than KPMG announced a new accounting facility hiring 300 high paid employees.

Dart: To Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, for one of the silliest quotes of the 2008 session: "We're going way, way too green, this Sierra Club promotion at taxpayer expense."

Oklahoma ranks as one of the top five physician-friendly states despite having 1.81 doctors per 1,000 residents - lowest ratio in America. [Physicians Magazine national survey]

Laurel: To T. Boone Pickens for his \$100 million gift to OSU academics. Let's hope he runs out of money before he again funds the swift boat liars, this time against Obama.

Much of the push for that last-minute \$475 million bond issue came from a reported \$1 million that highway contractors spent to win \$300 million for roads and bridges.

Dart: To Oklahoma's gross underfunding of programs to move people out of poverty. The rate jumped 2% between 2005-06 - now 15.4% of the state's population. [Oklahoma Policy Institute]

The yokel Republican who filed against incumbent U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe said he did it "because God told me to." We called God and He said He was just kidding the guy.

Laurel: To Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton for doing what we thought had become impossible - energizing the 18-34 year old to vote.

We're busting our buttons with pride after Tulsa's Booker T. Washington High School won the National Academic Championship in Chicago.

Laurel: To congressional Democrats attempting to eliminate \$17 billion in annual subsidies for Big Oil. A GOP filibuster killed the bill, with Sens. Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn voting to continue welfare for big oil.

States and cities demand that the Feds speed up deportation of illegals yet the average wait time is three years because the Feds can't keep up. [Stateline]

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer




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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I am grieved by the hue and cry over the sheer extravagance of driving a gas-guzzler to work! I am teary-eyed over the predicament of our deciding whether to buy meds or food! I lament the fact many of us don't have the resources to send our children to college, etc., etc., etc.

Excuse me! Just this morning I read that citizens of the United States of America on one gorgeous spring weekend spent \$55 million to see a movie [and – would you believe – entitled *Sex and the City?*].

I will schedule my mourning over the price of gasoline when I see more than one person in the vehicle that charges past me at the stoplight! I am going to have to rearrange my prejudices and grieve over something else.

I think I'll cry over the fact some of my heroes are often "hoisted with their own petards!" Let's examine my former idol, William Jefferson Clinton, who brings to mind the word "disingenuous" when he so petulantly observed how "disrespectfully" the other party has been to his devoted [albeit delusional] wife. I would like to remind him [without going into the sleazy details] that HE is the one who disrespected her the most blatantly! I think the "sackcloth and ashes" are still in order, Bill!

Very soon now, probably in November, I think I will lay aside all my qualms about our comely President. When he considers his legacy perhaps he will realize that, after all, he did not have a unique and unarguable ability to determine God's will. He might even conclude "the devil made me do it."

Carmen Wilkerson  
Muskogee

Editor, The Observer:

How in this world can Tinker continue to compete for business against Hill Air Force Base when our labor force is spending more and more on transportation costs while Hill workers have no problems with costly gasoline conveyances?

Isn't this one of the big arguments that Tinker supporters have touted – our labor pool of experienced, hard-working, arguably the best workers in the nation?

Those laborers may discover they can work closer to their homes at lower salaries and still come out ahead rather than footing the gas costs from places like Lawton, Idabel, McAlester, Chickasha, etc.

When the next round of base closing considerations start, how do you think the rail transport in Utah will stack up to long, expensive miles of highway travel for Tinker's shrinking work force?

Our leaders are sticking their heads in the sand and building more highways. Who stands to profit by this neanderthal reasoning?

Darla Reynolds Sparks  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Scott McClellan's book *What Happened* seems to shock, but it is only one of many voices over the years that attest that George Bush and Dick Cheney and Karl Rove are total liars and committed a treason upon the American citizens.

Jim Stodola  
Denton, TX

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to my congressmen – Rep. Tom Cole and Sens. Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe – and others:

I heard Sen. Jeff Sessions say that the reason we have high gas prices is because the oil companies aren't allowed to drill wherever the hell they please, like pristine wildernesses or off shore.

Guess what? I know what jacking up prices to force people to let you do what you want is called. Extortion is what it is called and I don't like my congressmen allowing big oil to do it.

First, you wanted war with Iraq because we would have \$20 a barrel oil. That isn't happening and it isn't our oil anyway.

Let me make a suggestion:

Let ExxonMobil or Shell erect an oil well in the backyard of every congressman who voted against the wind-fall profits tax plan. I know Inhofe has lots of property in the boonies. I don't know if Cole has any country property, but my guess is if they put an oil well in his backyard in Moore, his voters will stop voting for him.

The first one should go in Sen. Sessions' yard since he says it is so clean and won't do damage.

We are allies with the biggest gas price gougers and we know that not one of the big U.S. oil companies is hurting and they are participating in the extortion.

The GOP needs to start worrying about people and stop worrying about millionaires and billionaires because there are more voters at the bottom



than at the top.

Sooner or later the religious community is going to realize that you are using their beliefs to get elected and then gouging the heck out of them in every other area, including sending their children to war while yours stay at home and create more wars.

Karen Webb  
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

As President Bush said, opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would likely mean lower gas prices. The AP reported in 2004 that opening an Alaska wildlife refuge to oil development would lower oil prices by less than 50 cents a barrel, according to an analysis released by the Energy Department. If Congress gave the go-ahead to pump oil from Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the crude could begin flowing by 2013 and reach a peak of 876,000 barrels a day by 2025. But even at peak production, the United States would still have to import two-thirds of its oil.

During the Bush presidency, crude oil prices have risen from about \$30 a barrel to \$130-plus. Shaving off 50 cents per barrel, more than a decade from now, is meaningless as far as price at the pump goes. Bush's propaganda is meant to serve his oil-related corporate friends.

Frank P. Belcastro  
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

It's fairly common knowledge by now that ethanol increases global warming, is worse to your health than gasoline, and inflates food prices, but what about second-generation ethanol that uses cellulose rather than the edible portion of food crops?

On the surface, it may seem resourceful to convert that corn cob into energy, but our hunger for fuel goes beyond what inedible food scraps can provide.

In fact, second-generation ethanol is perhaps even more dangerous than first generation ethanol under the simple understanding that if all plant matter is a potential fuel then all forests are potential gold mines for the fuel industry.

U.S. incentives for ethanol production have already contributed to massive deforestation in places like Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Amazon,

where rainforests are being cleared to grow biofuel crops. Cellulose ethanol would further promote this destruction by using the forest itself for fuel.

Americans love the idea that they won't need to sacrifice. There is no incentive to curb your consumption if science will save you by replacing that fuel in your inefficient internal combustion engine with another.

Turning CO2-absorbing trees into gasoline is not progress. It's just as insane as burning food to run a car. The only clean energies have always been wind, solar and water. Eyes back on the prize, folks. The goal should be to get off all fuels entirely.

Manila Ryce  
Los Angeles

Editor, The Observer:

Now that David Boren has joined us grandmas and grandpas in retirement age [67], I thought the 13-year president of the University of Oklahoma would be more understanding of what our "golden years" are like.

After reading his new book *Letter to America*, I'm convinced that our one-time "golden boy" doesn't have a clue.

"We need to substantially raise the retirement age [66 or 67] required to draw full benefits [from Social Security]," writes Boren.

"Because of advances in medical sciences, we are living longer than earlier generations did, and we, therefore, have the ability to work longer."

This nonsense comes from a former governor and U.S. senator with big insurance and retirement benefits, and who has had cushy desk jobs surrounded by an army of "go-fers."

Boren has never had a real job requiring 8-5 working hours and no aides to help with the heavy lifting.

He must have found Sen. John McCain's "fountain of youth" or has been given wings by "Red Bull" energy drinks if he doesn't think the "golden years" produce reduced performance, reduced endurance, slower reaction speed and decreased concentration as well as the increased likelihood you won't be hired or retained because of age discrimination.

We need to reduce the Social Security retirement for full benefits to age 60 for those of us struggling seniors who don't have David Boren's taxpayer-paid "golden parachute."

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner  
Wagoner

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## Frosty's Notebook

# The 4th Of July

The U.S. Constitution may seem just a fragile relic, its yellowed parchment pages sealed in a helium-filled enclosure in the National Archives.

But the approaching Fourth of July should remind us what a vital document it is and how badly it has been trampled by the Bush Administration.

It has provided not only the mechanics of government and protections of such individual rights as freedom of speech and religion, but also has helped create an environment in which free enterprise has flourished.

The 55 delegates called to Philadelphia to strengthen the Articles of Confederation convened at a time of serious economic difficulties in the new nation, not unlike America today.

Our credit is exhausted. We continue an unjust war. Housing is in crisis. Bankruptcies are at record highs. Our vaunted industrial base is exported. Our reputation worldwide is in tatters and the country is badly divided.

The confederacy's credit was exhausted, its securities selling at steep discounts. Farmers were being bankrupted by debt. Commerce was shackled by tariffs and other barriers the newly independent states had thrown up against one another. Southern agriculture and northern mercantile/financial interests were in sharp conflict.

Fears had arisen that the infant nation would fragment into regional confederations with their own governments serving narrow economic ends.

The framers – in particular James Madison and Alexander Hamilton – believed that fragmentation could be avoided if the people could be encouraged to turn to commerce.

If the new government could give everyone the opportunity to earn property, to amass capital, to have a stake in the nation, then they would support it rather than conflicting local interests.

They shared the belief that owning property was a natural right and, through the Constitution, encouraged a unity based on the sanctity of property and the individual who held it.

In short, the Constitution was at its root a document that promoted free enterprise.

Can a new administration in Washington issue a call to arms? Can faith be renewed in government of, by and for the people and not just for the rich and powerful?

Both Madison and Hamilton knew that national prosperity would not just happen. It had to be fostered by a Constitution which encouraged it and protected it and by legislators who, deep in their souls, believed in it.

The founding fathers drafted a Constitution that for more than two centuries has enabled free enterprise to flourish. Not predatory capitalism, but real free enterprise, not monopolies. Not a Supreme Court for the affluent.

## Multi-Billion Ripoff

Was it your good fortune to catch Robert Greenwald's documentary on cable, *Iraq For Sale*? It is a searing expose of Halliburton's multi-billion-dollar no-bid sole-source contracts ripoff of American taxpayers.

It is an astonishing hour featuring Halliburton employees, the military and members of Congress from both parties. Among the highlights:

Halliburton's subsidiary KBR operated 67 water plants, with 63 gushing contaminated, extremely dangerous water. Many troops came home with pathogens in their blood.

It shows our troops lined up in a sandstorm trying to get food. More than \$1.8 billion of the food contract was unsubstantiated.

Troops were given six packs of Pepsi and other drinks, bottled in Iraq and billed at \$45 per six-pack by Halliburton.

The laundry they operated produced clothing so grimy soldiers started trying to do their own laundry, only to be told it was forbidden.

Halliburton operated out of a training facility in Kuwait – a hugely expensive five-star facility where employees were provided new SUVs that cost taxpayers \$250,000.

Since contracts were cost-plus, when a truck or other vehicle needed service – such as a spare tire – they were burned. Employees were told that the more they spent, the higher the profit.

Halliburton truck drivers said they would drive empty trucks up and down highways, pretending to deliver goods to military posts. Some drivers were killed when they were dispatched into enemy gunfire.

Despite whistle-blowing by water purification expert Ben Carter, Lt. Col. Ralph Peters and numerous Halliburton grunts, the Republican Congress turned down bills to stop sole-source contracts and investigate Halliburton.

Stung by the revelations, Halliburton quickly spun off KBR, but not before its stock tripled.

Time magazine exposed the truth – Halliburton's sole-source contracts were orchestrated by Vice President Cheney, former CEO of Halliburton.

When President Bush was asked about the charges being reported in the media about Halliburton, he said his administration would "look into it." It never happened.

I am reminded of OCU's business school dean Vince Orza, writing in the *Oklahoma Gazette* about what a superb company Halliburton is. Say what?

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, JUNE 25, 2008, PAGE 5



On May 25, 1787, 55 prominent Americans convened in Philadelphia to adopt a document that would replace the Articles of Confederation.

Two centuries later, the U.S. Constitution has become a worldwide model of self-government. The first article of the Constitution authorized Congress to:

"Borrow money on the credit of the United States;" "Regulate commerce with foreign nations and among the several states;" "Establish ... uniform laws on the subject of bankruptcies;" "coin money ... and fix the standard of weights and measures;" "provide for the punishment of counterfeiting the securities and current coin of the United States;" "establish post offices."

The Fifth Amendment, adopted in 1791 as part of the Bill of Rights, says, "No person shall be ... deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation."

Yet torture, imprisonment without recourse to the courts, spying on ordinary citizens and rendition of prisoners is a way of life under the Bush Administration's vicious attack on constitutional rights.

The choice this year is clear. Will Bush policies be continued and enlarged by John McCain or will voters set a new course with a younger professor of constitutional law.

Beware false patriots. We think we can't lose this country but we can.

## Education Paycheck

An Oklahoma high school dropout earns about \$260,000 less over a lifetime [in current dollars] than a graduate and pays about \$60,000 less in taxes.

With 23 million high school dropouts between 18 and 67, that means the federal government and state governments lose more than \$50 billion a year in taxes. America foregoes \$292 billion, or 1.6% of gross domestic product, in combined income and tax revenue a year with each group of 18 year olds who never complete high school.

Increasing the educational attainment of those groups by one year would recoup nearly half those losses.

The average 45-year-old high school dropout is in worse health than the average 65-year-old high school graduate.

High school dropouts have a life expectancy that is 9.2 years shorter than graduates.

America could save \$7.9 billion to \$10.8 billion annually by improving educational attainment among recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [welfare], food stamps and housing assistance and thereby removing many of them from the rolls.

Because high school graduates are less likely to commit crimes, increasing the high school completion rate by just 1% for all men ages 20 to 60 would reduce the criminal justice system by as much as \$1.4 billion a year.

A one-year increase in average years of schooling for the dropouts would reduce murder and assault by almost 30%, motor vehicle theft by 20%, arson by 13% and burglary and larceny by about 6%.

Participation in model preschool programs has been shown to increase academic achievement, reduce dropout rates and lower the risk of teenage pregnancy, drug use and criminal violence. The economic benefits of such programs are as high as \$7 for each \$1 invested.

Our thanks to Henry Levin, professor of economics and education at Columbia University for the math.

**IF YOU DON'T VOTE, DON'T COMPLAIN**

# In Midst Of Ethical Lapses, A Silver Lining

By Arnold Hamilton

This year's headlines leave the unmistakable impression that graft and corruption pervade Oklahoma government: State Auditor and Inspector Jeff McMahan quits after being convicted in federal court of accepting illegal campaign contributions, jewelry and trips.

And Rep. Lance Cargill resigns as House Speaker amid revelations he failed to file and pay taxes and faced an investigation of questionable campaign finance dealings.

Lost in the all-too-familiar tales of shattered public trust is a more hopeful reality: New Ethics Commission rules and campaign finance laws give Oklahoma a fighting chance to curtail the corrosive influence of big money on the legislative process.

Four positive developments:

- The Ethics Commission banned PAC-to-PAC transfers, a favorite tool for special interests, lawmakers and candidates to disguise who's giving how much to whom.

- The panel also reduced the amount lobbyists can spend annually on state lawmakers from \$300 to \$100. An outright ban on all meals, gifts and entertainment is likely to be considered next year.

## RULES EFFECTIVE JULY 1

State lawmakers could have vetoed both the new rules, but opted instead to let them take effect July 1. Of course, it is – perhaps not-so-coincidentally – an election year, hardly a prime time to oppose good government proposals.

- Rep. David Dank, R-OKC, won passage of HB 2196 that makes it illegal for lobbyists and their clients to give in-session campaign contributions to lawmakers or legislative candidates.

The ban is aimed at fighting a notorious “pay-for-play” system in which campaign contributions are given in exchange for legislation being heard.

- The Ethics Commission is preparing to file suit to force the Legislature to meet its constitutional obligation to adequately fund the agency.

Nearly two decades after state voters approved a constitutional amendment to create the commission, it still has the same number of employees: seven. It was so financially strapped this year that it was forced to borrow paper from other state agencies.

## LESS THAN \$1 MILLION WOULD FUND IT

The Ethics Commission requested \$906,000 for next year in order to be fully funded, but the Legislature provided \$667,000 – about \$150,000 more than the current budget.

# Kid Wellness Is Better, Still Low

Oklahoma ranks 43rd in the nation in a new state-by-state study on the well-being of America's children.

The 2008 Kids Count Data Book reveals that Oklahoma improved on four of the 10 measures affecting child well-being and experienced six setbacks since 2000.

The 2008 Essay discusses youth who are involved in state juvenile justice systems and highlights new approaches to detention reform, such as the Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative [JDAI].

The essay challenges local and state-level institutions to reduce unnecessary and inappropriate detention and incarceration. In addition, increased opportunities for positive youth development are encouraged.

## BELOW NATIONAL RANK

Oklahoma's rate of detained and committed youth in custody is lower than the national rate.

In 2006, Oklahoma's rate of detained and committed youth in custody was 104 per 100,000 youth ages 10-15, which is lower than the national rate of 125 per 100,000 youth.

That same year, the state's estimated daily count of detained and committed youth in custody was 924 youth.

## SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE WAY DOWN

Higher percentage of Oklahoma teens are staying in school: The percentage of Oklahoma teens ages 16-19 who are high school dropouts declined by 43%, from 14% in 2000 down to 8% in 2006.

Percentage of children living in poverty increases: The percentage of Oklahoma children living in poverty increased by 26%, rising from 19% in 2000 to 24% in 2006.

The national percentage of children living in poverty was 17% and 18% during the same period.

## CHILD DEATH RATE UP

Oklahoma's child death rate increased by 12%, from 25 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14 in 2000 to 28 deaths per 100,000 children in 2005.

Likewise, the teen death rate increased by 17%, from 77 deaths per 100,000 teens ages 15-19 in 2000 to 90 deaths per 100,000 teens in 2005. Oklahoma ranks 45th nationally on both indicators.



Worse, lawmakers demanded \$50,000 of the appropriation be spent on software the Ethics Commission didn't want or need and that was incompatible with the current system.

Gov. Brad Henry, who urges the commission not to file suit, used his line-item veto to eliminate the software requirement, a carrot perhaps to dissuade legal action. But the appropriation is woefully inadequate – and lawmakers know it.

The reality is, legislative leaders don't want an Ethics Commission with any serious bite. They simply want a commission in place to give the illusion of a pristine political system in Oklahoma.

## IT'S MAGIC: MONEY SUDDENLY APPEARS

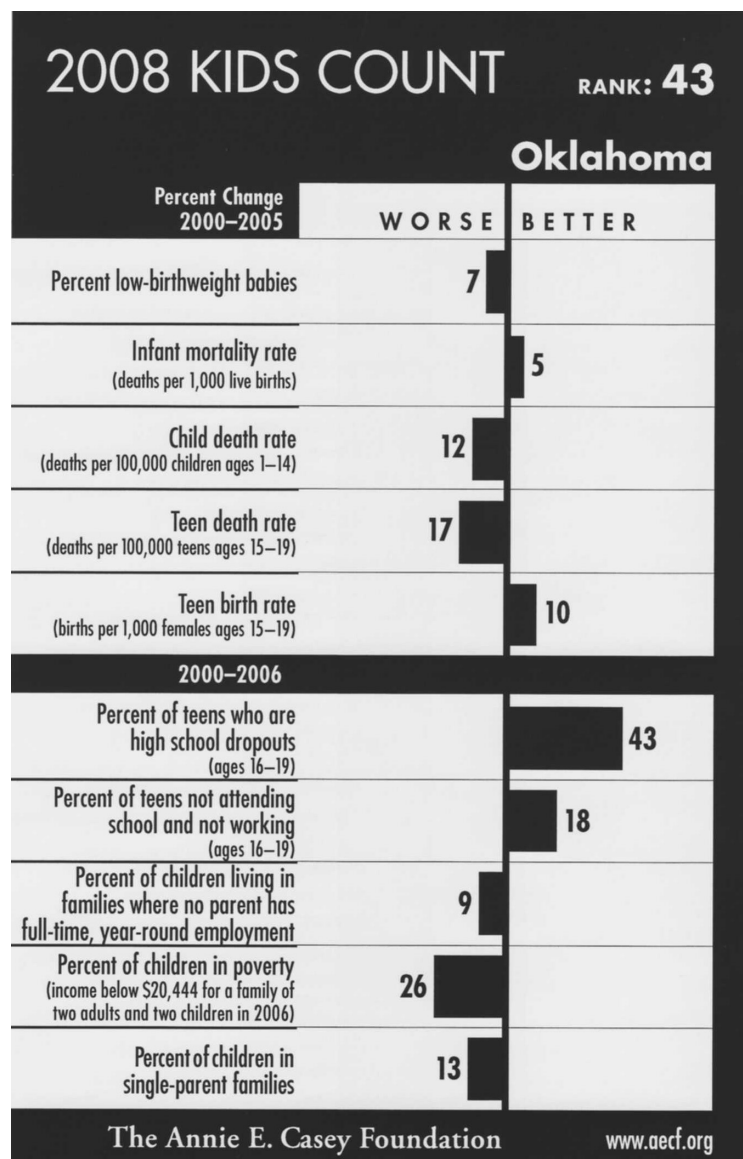
Need more proof? In a lean budget year, the Legislature found millions of dollars at the last minute to bolster the finances of other state agencies and to provide significant pay raises to Senate employees. But it couldn't spare \$240,000 to adequately fund the Ethics Commission?

“The Legislature has exposed its hand,” said John Raley, the commission's vice chair. “The money is there, if they choose to expend it.”

In another sign of legislative resistance to cleaning up the campaign finance system, Dank's Oklahoma Clean Campaigns Act of 2008 was largely gutted by House and Senate powers-that-be – Republicans and Democrats alike.

For example, Dank proposed even stiffer penalties for violation of the PAC-to-PAC prohibition. The transfers amount to a legalized “straw donor” system in which donors can exceed campaign contribution limits by funneling extra money through other PACs to their favored candidates.

Dank promises to be back next year with a more comprehensive measure aimed at regulating campaign contributions.



## Hey! Don't Be So Quick To Bury America

Before you bury a "failed" America, check a few facts:

- 94% of Americans believe in a Supreme Being.
- 84% believe in a personal God.
- Organized religion in America is at a 10-year high.
- 75% believe in hell.
- 80% believe in miracles.
- 90% pray – 75% pray daily.
- 82% believe in the healing power of prayer.
- 77% don't believe in TV faith healers.
- 69% belong to a faith community [in 1776 it was 17%].
- 43% attend church regularly.
- 58% say religion is very important in their lives.
- 69% support a moment of silence in school.
- 83% rank organized religion at the top of the confidence chart.
- 41% have very little confidence in the national media.
- 95% of Americans never use illegal drugs.
- 88% drink moderately or don't drink at all.
- 82% report gathering with friends or relatives weekly.
- 89.2 million Americans volunteered last year – 19 billion hours.
- 48% of the population volunteered an average four hours a week.
- 54% of Americans are in charitable or social services activities.
- Giving is up: \$280 per capita in 1960, \$522 in 1996 – up 80%.

- Americans give \$123 billion to religion, education, health, art, etc.
  - 23% donated to a political cause or candidate last year, up from 13%.
  - 68% of Americans still have strong confidence in their government.
  - 85% have never cheated on a spouse.
  - American workers led the world in productivity again in 1996.
  - 76% exercise regularly.
  - 49% always drive at or below the speed limit.
  - 89% finish high school or have a GED.
  - 81% of parents participate in school activities. PTA membership is at a record high.
  - 95% of individuals pay their taxes and don't cheat.
  - 50% marry for life.
  - 95% never go to jail.
  - 65% qualifying for welfare or food stamps never apply.
  - 77% of Americans avoid movies that exploit sex and violence.
  - 78% of teenagers don't drink.
  - 57% of teens participate in community service.
  - 62% of adults think teens have had sex by age 16 when 70% are virgins.
  - 1.5 million couples seek adoptions each year.
- **Compiled by Frosty Troy, The Oklahoma Observer**  
[Sources: Gallup Poll, Time/CNN Poll, Harris Poll, Newsweek, New York Times, Los Angeles Times Survey, Columbia University Confidence Poll]

## The Awful Truth About Veteran Suicides

By Aaron Glantz

Eighteen American war veterans kill themselves every day. One thousand former soldiers receiving care from the Department of Veterans Affairs attempt suicide every month. More veterans are committing suicide than are dying in combat overseas.

These are statistics that most Americans don't know, because the Bush Administration has refused to tell them. Since the start of the Iraq War, the government has tried to present it as a war without casualties.

In fact, they never would have come to light were it not for a class action lawsuit brought by Veterans for Common Sense and Veterans United for Truth on behalf of the 1.7 million Americans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The two groups allege the Department of Veterans Affairs has systematically denied mental health care and disability benefits to veterans returning from the conflict zones.

### FEDERAL CASE HEARD IN CALIFORNIA

The case, officially known as Veterans for Common Sense vs. Peake, went to trial at a federal courthouse in San Francisco. The two sides were still filing briefs last month waiting for a ruling from Judge Samuel Conti, but the case is already having an impact.

That's because over the course of the two-week trial, the VA was compelled to produce a series of documents that show the extent of the crisis affecting wounded soldiers.

"Shh!" begins one e-mail from Dr. Ira Katz, the head of the VA's Mental Health Division, advising a media spokesperson not to tell CBS News that 1,000 veterans receiving care at the VA try to kill themselves every month.

### SUICIDES REPORTED TO VA FACILITIES

"Our suicide prevention coordinators are identifying about 1,000 suicide attempts per month among the veterans we see in our medical facilities," he wrote.

"Is this something we should [carefully] address ourselves in some sort of release before someone stumbles on it?" the e-mail concludes.

Leading Democrats on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee immediately called for Katz's resignation. The chair of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Bob Filner, D-CA, convened a hearing titled The Truth About Veterans Suicides and called Katz and VA Secretary James Peake to testify.

### HE TESTIFIES IT WAS IN POOR TASTE

"That e-mail was in poor tone but the content was part of a dialogue about what we should do about new information," Katz said in response to Filner's questions.

"The e-mail represents a healthy dialogue among members of VA staff about when it's appropriate to disclose and make public information early in the process."

Filner was nonplused and accused Katz and Peake of a cover-up.

"We should all be angry about what has gone on here," Filner said. "This is a matter of life and death for the veterans that we are responsible for and I think there was criminal negligence in the way this was handled."

"If we do not admit, assume or know then the problem will continue and people will die. If that's not criminal negligence, I don't know what is."

### IT IS ALL PART OF A PATTERN

It is also part of a pattern. The high number of veteran suicides weren't the only government statistics the Bush Administration was forced to reveal because of the class action lawsuit.

Another set of documents presented in court showed that in the six months leading up to March 31, a total of 1,467 veterans died waiting to learn if their dis-



ability claim would be approved by the government.

A third set of documents showed that veterans who appeal a VA decision to deny their disability claim have to wait an average of 1,608 days, or nearly 4 1/2 years, for their answer.

The Pentagon regularly reports on the numbers of American troops wounded in Iraq [currently at 31,948] but neglects to mention that it has two other categories injured [10,180] and ill [28,451].

### BUT THEY ARE ALL SOLDIERS

All three of these categories represent soldiers who are so damaged physically they have to be medically evacuated to Germany for treatment, but by splitting the numbers up the sense of casualties is down in the public consciousness.

Here is another number that we don't often hear discussed in the media: 287,790. That's the number of returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who had filed a disability claim with the Veterans Administration as of March 25.

That figure was not announced to the public at a news conference, but obtained by Veterans for Common Sense using the Freedom of Information Act.

### BUSH DOESN'T WANT AMERICANS TO WAKE UP

Why all the secrecy? Why is it so hard to get accurate casualty figures out of our government? Because the Bush Administration knows if Americans woke up to the real, human costs of this war they would fight harder to oppose it.

Think back to 2002, before the invasion of Iraq, when leading neo-cons, including Donald Rumsfeld aide Ken Adelman, predicted the war would be a cakewalk.

Or consider this statement from Vice President Dick Cheney. Two days before the invasion, Cheney told NBC's Tim Russert the war would go relatively quickly, ending in weeks rather than months.

Today, those comments are gone but the motivation behind them remains. This is why the VA's head of mental health wrote "Shh!" telling a spokesperson not to respond to a reporter's inquiry.

See SUICIDES Page 8

## 300,000 Vets Have Mental Problems

Some 300,000 U.S. troops are suffering from major depression, or post-traumatic stress from serving in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and 320,000 received brain injuries, a new study reports.

Only about half have sought treatment, said the study released by the RAND Corp.

"There is a major health crisis facing those men and women who have served our nation in Iraq and Afghanistan," said Terri Tanielian, the project's co-leader and a researcher at the nonprofit RAND.

"Unless they receive appropriate and effective care for these mental health conditions, there will be long-term consequences for them and for the nation," she said in an interview with the Associated Press.

### FIRST LARGE-SCALE STUDY

The 500-page study is the first large-scale, private assessment of its kind – including a survey of 1,965 service members across the country, from all branches of the armed forces and including those still in the military as well veterans who have left the services.

Its results appear consistent with a number of mental health reports from within the government, though the Defense Department has not released the number of people it has diagnosed or who are being treated for mental problems.

The Department of Veterans Affairs said its records show about 120,000 who served in the two wars and are no longer in the military have been diagnosed with mental health problems. Of the 120,000, approximately 60,000 are suffering from PTSD, the VA said.

### VA PLAYS DOWN RAND REPORT

Veterans Affairs is responsible for care of service members after they have left the service, while the Defense Department covers active duty and reservist needs. The lack of information from the Pentagon was one motivation for the RAND study, Tanielian said.

The most prominent and detailed military study on mental health that is released is the Army's survey of soldiers at the warfront. Officials said last month that its most recent one, done last fall, found 18.2% of soldiers suffered a mental health problem such as depression, anxiety or acute stress in 2007 compared with 20.5% the previous year.

The Rand study put the percentage of PTSD and depression at 18.5%, calculating that approximately 300,000 current and former service members were suffering from those problems at the time of its survey, which was completed in January.

### FIGURE BASED ON PENTAGON DATA

The figure is based on Pentagon data showing over 1.6 million military personnel have deployed to the conflicts since the war in Afghanistan began in late 2001.

RAND researchers also found:

- About 19% – or some 320,000 services members – reported that they experienced a possible traumatic brain injury while deployed. In wars where blasts from roadside bombs are prevalent, the injuries can range from mild concussions to severe head wounds.

## In Iraq, A Case Of Death By Privatization

By Jim Hightower

On Jan. 2, yet another American soldier died in Iraq. But Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth, a highly decorated Green Beret, didn't die from a roadside bomb or an al-Qaeda sniper. He was killed by his shower.

More accurately, Maseth's killer was privatization. That's the out-of-control policy of turning over essential military support systems to a sprawling, unregulated network of for-profit corporations and letting them get away again and again with shoddy – even deadly – work.

Maseth was safely inside his Army base in Baghdad when he reached for the shower faucet. Electricity instantly shot through the pipes, through the water itself, and through his entire body, electrocuting him.

His mother, stunned, pressed the Army for details, but got only hemming and hawing at first. Then she got a lie: She was told that her son had a "small appliance" with him in the shower.

She knew better and kept pushing, finally learning that the facility's water pump had not been properly grounded.

### IT WASN'T HALLIBURTON'S PROBLEM?

Worse, Army documents reveal that Halliburton, under contract to inspect such systems, had found serious electrical problems in this facility nearly a year before Maseth's last shower.

Why wasn't it fixed? Because Halliburton's contract did not cover "fixing potential hazards," instead requiring only that it fix equipment already malfunctioning.

Meanwhile, the Army itself should have known about this death trap, but under the Pentagon's convoluted privatized system, the danger that Halliburton found was not red-flagged and was never reviewed by a "qualified government employee."

At least a dozen of our soldiers have been killed by improper grounding of electrical equipment, but Halliburton coldly claims that it is not part of the Army and



- About 7% reported both a probable brain injury and current PTSD or major depression.
- Only 43% reported ever being evaluated by a physician for their head injuries.
- Only 53% of service members with PTSD or depression sought help over the past year.

### REASONS FOR NOT SEEKING HELP

They gave various reasons for not getting help, including that they worried about the side effects of medication; believe family and friends could help them with the problem, or that they feared seeking care might damage their careers.

Rates of PTSD and major depression were highest among women and reservists.

The report is titled "Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery."

It was sponsored by a grant from the California Community Foundation and done by 25 researchers from RAND Health and the RAND National Security Research Division, which also does work under contracts with the Pentagon and other defense agencies as well as allied foreign governments and foundations.

has no contractual obligation to prevent the electrocution of American troops.

### BIG OIL'S FREE-MARKET HOKUM

Five honchos of Big Oil appeared before Congress last month singing in perfect harmony their old tune that skyrocketing gasoline prices are simply the product of free-market forces. "The fundamental laws of supply and demand are at work,"

See HOKUM Page 11

## SUICIDES

From Page 7

All the shushing in the world cannot stop the horrible pain that's mounting after five years of war in Iraq and nearly seven years of war in Afghanistan.

Bush and Congress have the power to stop this problem before it gets worse. It's not too late to extend needed mental health care to our returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans; it's not too late to begin properly screening and treating returning servicemen and women who've experienced a traumatic brain injury.

It is not too late to simplify the disability claims process so that wounded veterans do not die waiting for their check. As the Rand study shows [see story at top of this page], this isn't only in the best interest of veterans, it's in the best interest of our country in the long run.

To start with, the Bush Administration needs to give us some honest information about the true human costs of the Iraq War.

– The author, a Foreign Policy In Focus contributor, is the author of two upcoming books on Iraq: *The War Comes Home: Washington's Battle Against America's Veterans* [UC Press] and *Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan – Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations* [Haymarket]

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Drive 55, Keep Your Family's Budget Alive

By Deborah Astley

Whether one is a Democrat, Republican, independent, libertarian or apolitical [how can there be such an animal?], there is one thing that affects all of us and that is the price of a gallon of gas.

In the 1970s the leaders of our nation, both the executive branch and the legislative branch, urged conservation by passing national energy emergency acts, limiting the speed limit on our nation's highways to 55 miles per hour.

In 2008, twice, the leader of the United States personally asked King Abudulrah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia to increase oil production. Twice the Saudi king rebuffed Bush.

I have written to Gov. Brad Henry twice [two responses showing that my letters had been read and the points therein addressed]; my state representative, Joe Dorman, twice [one response]; U.S. Sens. Jim Inhofe [one automated response] and Tom Coburn [one response showing he had read my letter and addressed the points therein]; and U.S. Rep. Tom Cole [one automated response].

### HOW OKLAHOMA COULD LEAD WAY

In my letters I suggested that Oklahoma lead the way in reducing our speed limit to 55 mph to conserve gasoline.

I mean, hey, Mayor Mick Cornett is getting OKC to lose weight, right? As a state, we could work together to conserve gasoline. Oklahoma could lead the nation in something positive.

No one wants to drive slower – I get that; neither do I. We can't afford to buy a hybrid or electric car. Can you?

But driving 55 mph is something everyone can do and it does work. We have increased our miles per gallon by five miles per gallon. That might not sound like a huge amount, but it has made a difference. Our tank of gasoline is lasting longer.

We have adjusted our mindset accordingly and we leave a little bit earlier so we will still make it to our destination on time.

### IMAGINE IF EVERYONE DID IT

Now, just imagine if everyone in the United States were to adjust driving speeds to 55 mph. The supply of oil would build. The speculators would see that the people of the United States are taking action.

The price per barrel would go down – maybe not immediately – but it took awhile for us to get into this mess.



Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve will not solve this problem. Oil – its cost and its slowly disappearing availability – has been the elephant sitting in our living room for a long, long time.

If it doesn't bother you that the leader of this nation is saying he's really sorry but there is nothing he can do about gasoline prices and if it doesn't bother you that the best solution anyone who has the eyes and ears of the media has mentioned is to suspend gasoline taxes for the summer – a solution which will only come back to bite us – then you haven't been paying attention.

### QUIT WHINING, TAKE ACTION

We should continue to develop alternative fuel resources, but there is something we can do now. People, there is something we can do besides whine. I urge everyone to visit the website, [www.Drive55.org](http://www.Drive55.org).

We have a Drive 55 bumper sticker on our vehicle now. We set the cruise control on 55 mph and stay in the right-hand lane.

So if you run up behind us out there on the Oklahoma highways – and you curse us because we aren't "going with the flow" – take a deep breath, and think, "Maybe all of the USA needs to slow down."

Slowing down works. Try it.

– The author lives in Fletcher

# Sadly, Bigotry Still Abounds In Oklahoma

By Daniel Humphrey

I've always had pride in my Oklahoma roots. Throughout the 30 years I worked in Washington, DC, I unabashedly let people know where I grew up.

Upon my retirement and return to the Sooner State my pride in and respect for Oklahomans has held up, mostly.

I spent my teenage and college years observing the political change of Oklahoma. During that time, Oklahoma began a shift from its populist, progressive foundation to a state with a right-wing intolerant political elite and my return found this elite entrenched.

However, those of us who have studied history should not have been surprised how easily Oklahoma changed. The dark side of populism was always racism and it was easy for the right to exploit this dark side.

### 'GOOD' PEOPLE AND RACISM

As a teen, I often heard "good" people say, "I have no problem with welfare for people, but not for n-----." I was in the room and heard Republican activists tell my father that if he helped get Republicans elected, they would work for the repeal of civil rights legislation.

It is no coincidence that the political shift in Oklahoma began after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the perceived betrayal of white people by Lyndon Johnson and the Democrats.

Those on the right tell you that the national security issue drives Oklahoma's support for their candidates. However, those on the right repeatedly show themselves willing to spend other families' blood and treasure to protect America.

The Reagan administration was populated with highly positioned individuals who spent much of the Vietnam era with seminary deferments. A look at the current administration finds many of those individuals still around.

No, national security is a ruse.

### LACK OF PROGRESS DISAPPOINTING

You can only hope that those you love and care about, family, friends or Oklahoma can grow and mature. However, you often find disappointment.

Recently, I was talking with a long-time friend from my college days. He expressed how upset he is with everything the Republicans have done in Washington and said that they've ruined the country.

However, what really bothers him is that "I have to vote for McCain."

I asked, "What about Obama?"

He responded, "People can't vote for a nig ... ah, well, you know what I mean."

I'm upset to find, after 44 years, that in Oklahoma those of color still aren't people and bigotry trumps everything.

– The author lives in Norman

# America's Cowardly Response To BushCo

By Steve Waterman

I believe George Bush is guilty of treason.

Never mind that he is one of the dumbest, most incapable presidents ever in the history of the nation [OK, maybe the only STUPID one], but he should be held responsible and impeached at least, imprisoned at most [as the death penalty for treason is so passé].

And his co-conspirators – Cheney, Rice, Rove, Rumsfeld, Powell, Wolfowitz and a handful of others – should follow suit.

This man and his controllers [handlers, perhaps; I dare not say minions, as that implies leadership] need to be tried [and let a jury decide their fate] and hung out to dry.

### DRAFT DODGERS DRUMBEAT FOR WAR

Each and every one of them, minus Rumsfeld and Powell, were draft dodgers when their country called and now blame the intelligence on their push for war.

The intelligence was accurate. They chose to listen to and act on what they wanted to hear and believe.

The fact that we allow them to stay in power is inexcusable and downright cowardly of us as a nation.

These men and women need to be hung out to dry; and hanging them out to dry may very well be what we need to do to gain respect and trust back from every other country in the world.

### NO ONE TO BLAME BUT OURSELVES

We, as a nation, have grown complacent and cowardly. This is our fault. Maybe the era of the hippies and drugs wasn't so bad. They did drive Nixon out of power.

Too bad those hippies had to grow up and outlaw everything they were doing.

See TREASON Page 10

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Saving The Illinois Before It's Too Late

By Phil Lorenz

Is the runoff from poultry operations in Arkansas into the Illinois River a threat to health?

Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson says "yes." The poultry industry says "no."

The evidence is not statistically compelling for either side. The incidences of campylobacteriosis and salmonella are abnormally high in some – but not all – counties in the Illinois River watershed.

However, that amounts to only 10 cases reported in 2005, which is perhaps not enough to justify pushing the panic button.

### TRENDS ARE FRIGHTENING

Nevertheless, there are trends that are, indeed, scary. It is a scientific fact that the overall load of the river exceeds Oklahoma Water Quality Standards for phosphorus and counts of bacteria such as fecal coliform, E. Coli, and fecal strep. Phosphorus is recognized as the agent for the tragic degradation of Lake Tenkiller.

Every month during the decade following 1995, the U.S. Geological Survey collected and analyzed water samples from three sites along the river. The data have been summarized by Dr. Riley Needham, retired Phillips Petroleum research chemist. His findings:

- Many samples had bacterial counts above the "standard level" for hazard to health. For fecal strep it was more than 90% of the samples.
- The level was highest at the Arkansas state line and diminished downstream [increased distance from the source].
- The level increased dramatically with increased flow-rate [indicating runoff as the source].
- The highest seasonal level overlapped with the recreational season.
- There was a marked increase in the second half of the decade [things are getting worse].

### RECENT RESEARCH FROM THREE EXPERTS

The problem has been reviewed recently by three experts in the fields of microbiology and water quality: Dr. Christopher M. Teaf of Florida State University, Dr. J. Harwood of the University of South Florida, and Dr. Roger Olsen of Camp Dresser & McKee Inc.

They have taken thousands of samples of water – and sediments – from the river and its tributaries.

Analysis was performed for phosphorus, bacteria, organic carbon, potassium, copper, zinc, and nitrogen compounds. The amounts of contaminants, relative to each other, corresponded with the distribution in poultry litter – the so-called "signature."

## Great Session For Natural Resources

Conservation leaders in Oklahoma are hailing the just completed legislative session as "landmark" for natural resource work statewide. It was one of the few success stories.

"The 2008 legislative session was definitely one for the record books when it comes to natural resource conservation," said Scotty Herriman, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts [OACD].

"The Legislature passed significant conservation legislation and allocated an all-time record level of funding for natural resource conservation work this spring. You can't ask for much more than that."

Herriman cited several legislative accomplishments, including the passage of SB 1766 by Rep. Dale DeWitt and Sen. Charles Wyrick, a measure that modernizes the Oklahoma Conservation District Act by updating the statute to reflect changes in federal law.

This legislation also gives conservation district directors the ability to purchase state insurance in the same manner that school board members can.

The measure also limits liability on water quality in flood control structures, change that according to Herriman was desperately needed.

### BURDEN REMOVED FROM LOCAL BOARDS

"This change in liability law takes a real burden off of our local district boards," Herriman said. "We can't control what someone does in or above a watershed lake. This change in the law simply says that since we can't control what goes in the water, we shouldn't be held liable for what someone else does."

Herriman also praised the Legislature and Gov. Brad Henry for the approval of record funding for conservation, including the passage of \$25 million in bond funds to repair damage caused by floods of 2007 and 2008.

"Whether it's flood control dams, waterways, terraces or other land improvements, the entire conservation infrastructure suffered incredible damage this past year," Herriman said.

"The state answered this spring with a record \$36 million for conservation. When this is matched with federal and local sources, this money will become roughly \$126 million to fix the damage caused to dams and other parts of the conservation infrastructure.

"With this help we can make sure that the protection we have enjoyed for the last 60-plus years is maintained for the future."

Clay Pope, executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation



This signature is not present in waters far removed from poultry operations. If the primary source had been cattle, urban discharge, or the impact of recreation, the signature would have been notably different.

### BACTERIA IN WELL, SPRING WATER

Especially disturbing is the presence of pathological bacteria in ground water from wells and springs. Standard handling of chicken litter is to spread it out as fertilizer. The substratum of the land comprising the watershed is porous karst, which presents an imperfect barrier to penetration of land-applied materials.

Poultry companies have contested the validity of these data, asserting that samples were collected by "rookies" with poor control over sampling procedures. However, the results conform with those obtained professionally by the Geological Survey.

So far the evidence for an actual health-hazard from poultry contaminants is marginal, but it seems prudent to take action before it becomes serious. New Zealand has had to confront high incidence of disease with new guidelines for the poultry industry. Their new code allows for closure penalties if a processor fails to comply.

Attorney General Edmondson needs public support for his lawsuit against the Arkansas poultry industry. A message of support and thanks can be e-mailed to [suzy.thrash@oag.state.ok.us](mailto:suzy.thrash@oag.state.ok.us).

Several citizen groups have announced support. The most active one is Save The Illinois River [STIR], 24369 E. 757 Rd., Tahlequah, OK 74464. STIR maintains a very informative website at [www.illinoisriver.org](http://www.illinoisriver.org).

– The author lives in Bartlesville

Districts, agreed with Herriman that the 2008 Legislature was indeed historic.

"Even during the days of the Dust Bowl, Oklahoma has never put as many resources into conservation efforts as they did this spring," Pope said.

"Gov. Henry and the members of the Senate and the House are to be commended for passing the \$25 million bond package to deal with the damage our state suffered this past year as well as their appropriation of over \$11 million from general revenue and gross production taxes for ongoing conservation needs."

## TREASON

From Page 9

They got the status quo they wanted and changed the rules. Now they are in power, just like China.

Darkness at noon brought upon us by the very people who fought it.

Home Depot, Wal-Mart, Exxon, Haliburton, Ford, Time-Warner, American Idol are all symptoms of our complacency. Along with a 25% turnout for municipal elections and complaining about \$4 gas when we drive Hummers.

No wonder Mr. Treason is the President and will remain so. We have lost our way.

Jefferson would have had a duel with this man. And win or lose, we would have won. Now we have lost.

Time to go shopping and save our country. Think I'd rather work, love and take care of my family than take my dogs for a walk. Oh, and stay up on the news and not support a liar, a draft dodger and not support a man, an administration and many political leaders willing to fight to the last drop with other people's blood.

– The author, a former Oklahoman, lives in Rowlett, TX

## An Immaculate Version

A 10-year-old, under the tutelage of her grandmother, was becoming quite knowledgeable about the Bible.

Then, one day, she floored her grandmother by asking, "Which Virgin was the mother of Jesus?"

"The Virgin Mary? Or the King James Virgin?"

## BOOKS

# From 'Straight Talk' To Pandered-In-Chief

By Michael Tomasky

### FREE RIDE

*John McCain And The Media*  
By David Brock and Paul Waldman  
Anchor  
218 pages, \$13.95

### THE REAL MCCAIN

*Why Conservatives Don't Trust Him – And Why Independents Shouldn't*  
By Cliff Schechter  
PoliPoint  
186 pages, \$14.95

### MCCAIN

*The Myth of a Maverick*  
By Matt Welch  
Palgrave Macmillan  
226 pages, \$27.95

It is little remembered today that the political career of John Sidney McCain III, a career now thoroughly laundered in mythology, began with the help of several fortuities.

In 1973 he returned from his 5½ years of captivity in North Vietnam to Washington, or technically Arlington, VA, which had been his childhood home for more years than any other single place as he followed his father, a celebrated four-star admiral, on the elder McCain's naval assignments.

He was one of 591 prisoners of war repatriated early that year as a result of Operation Homecoming, and was selected by the editors of US News & World Report as the one returning POW who would be given a 13-page spread in the magazine to describe his ordeal [having a famous father never hurts], which brought him the same kind of attention and acclaim that had earlier, for different purposes, been showered upon the young Hillary Diane Rodham and the young John Forbes Kerry.

By 1977 he held the post of naval liaison to Congress, his father's old position, and shortly thereafter attained the rank of captain. It was on Capitol Hill that he met and befriended important senators – Gary Hart of Colorado, William Cohen of Maine, and most of all John Tower of Texas, the buddy to whom he was closest during a period of his life that included its share of carousing and irreparably strained his marriage to his first wife, Carol.

#### DUMPING CAROL, PURSUING CINDY

When asked to explain the dissolution of their marriage in the late 1970s, she said, "I attribute it more to John turning 40 and wanting to be 25 again than I do to anything else."

But here was the first piece of luck, for his split from Carol enabled him to romance Cindy Hensley, an Arizonan 17 years his junior whom he had met while vacationing in Honolulu in 1979 [he was separated] and with whom he was in love, he has written, by the end of their first evening together.

They married in May 1980, and from this union tumbled other fortuities. That she lived in Arizona meant that McCain would be moving to a state – with which he'd had even less association than Hillary Clinton had had with New York in 1999 – whose growing population would gain it an extra congressional seat after the 1980 census, a circumstance on which his eye was keenly fixed.

Her background – her father, Jim, ran the country's largest Anheuser-Busch distributorship – meant he would have the money and connections to launch the political career he had been coveting since he started meeting those famous pols.

#### CARPETBAGGER AND OPPORTUNIST

McCain hardly knew a soul in Arizona, but already he was telling friends in 1981 that he would swoop into the new seat in 1982 and then succeed Barry Goldwater in the Senate when Goldwater retired.

Then, one piece of bad luck: the new district would be cut in Tucson, not Phoenix. But this was soon followed by the greatest fortuity of all. John Rhodes, the Phoenix Republican who was the House minority leader, unexpectedly announced his retirement.

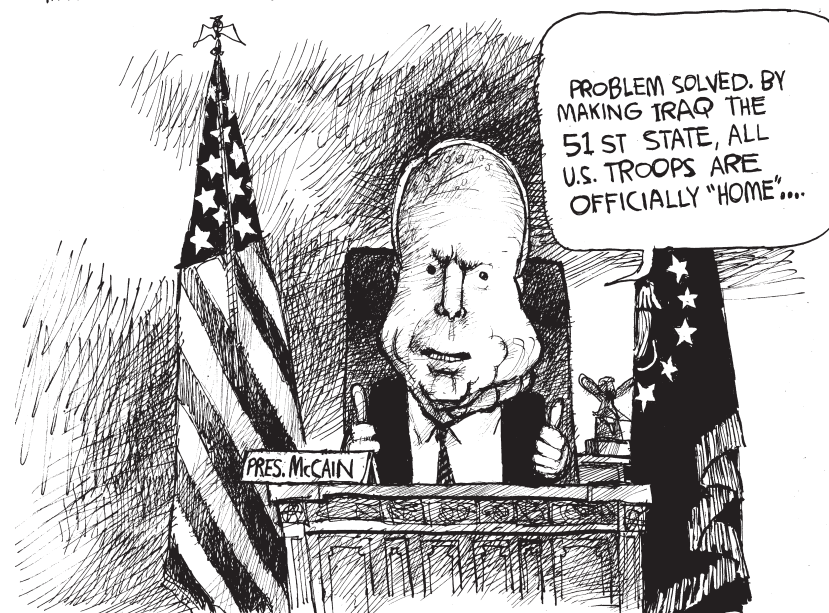
The McCains lived just outside the Rhodes district, but Cindy's money ensured that they were able to buy a house in it and move in immediately.

During a primary campaign against three other Republicans, he was, inevitably, branded a carpetbagger and opportunist. Confronted with these allegations at a candidates' forum, he delivered a riposte that would win him the seat and would foreshadow the kind of rhetorical agility that has so impressed reporters.

#### EXTRAORDINARY LUCK IN 2008

Twenty-six years later, McCain has secured the Republican presidential nomination and launched his general election campaign, itself the result of even more happy coincidences – Rudy Giuliani's inexplicable decision to skip all the early contests, Mitt Romney's unsteadiness on the national stage, the absence of a consensus on a "real conservative" choice, and press reports suggesting that the initially unpopular troop surge in Iraq, on which he'd placed his bet in late 2006 when President Bush was considering the Iraq Study Group report, was beginning to achieve some success.

MIKE LUKOVICH



This should by all rights be a Democratic year, but the Democrats have been locked in ferocious battle, ensuring that one final piece of good fortune awaited McCain in that he will face a black man who no longer "transcends race" in anything like the way he did a few months ago.

But as Arnold Palmer reportedly once said, "It's a funny thing, the more I practice, the luckier I get." McCain's career is undeniably built also upon skill and shrewdness unusual among contemporary American politicians. It's not that he's been an especially accomplished legislator, although passage of the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act took years and much resolve, as Elizabeth Drew shows in her engrossing *Citizen McCain* from 2002.

#### NO TIME FOR 'THE LITTLE PEOPLE'

Nor has he been an especially energetic servant of his Arizona constituents. Welch even asserts that McCain "is infamous throughout his home state as someone who studiously avoids mixing with the little people."

But what McCain has been, of course, is a brilliant strategist of the culture of Washington, and particularly of the arbiters of conventional wisdom in the national press.

McCain understands intuitively how reputations are built and maintained. As David Brock and Paul Waldman of the liberal nonprofit group Media Matters for America put it in *Free Ride*, McCain has "cracked the media code" of how to turn these ostensible adversaries into his allies and, on numerous occasions, even his apologists.

He became the press's darling in 1999 and 2000, during his first presidential run, the famous "Straight-Talk Express" days.

He has since transformed himself into a very different and much more conventional conservative politician. But the fact of that transformation hasn't really taken hold yet in the national press.

There is therefore the expectation – or, among liberals, fear – that the mass media will give McCain the benefit of every doubt against Obama. The tendency is already in evidence here and there – the proposed elimination of the federal gas tax for the summer, endorsed first by McCain and then by Hillary Clinton,

See REAL MCCAIN Page 14

## HOKUM

From Page 8

crooned the president of Shell Oil.

Bovine excrement! There is no free market in the oil industry.

Sure, global demand for petroleum is up, but under free-market laws, supply is supposed to rise to meet that demand and hold prices stable. There's only a handful of global suppliers, however, and these oligopolists openly conspire to restrict the flow of crude, thus doubling oil prices in the past year.

Who are the oligopolists? The OPEC cartel, for sure, which has flatly rejected pleas to open up its pipelines. But it's not the only one.

Yes, Saudi Arabia and Iran are the two largest producers on the globe, but who is the third? ExxonMobil! Exxon, Shell, BP and other brand-name gasoline giants who so piously invoke supply and demand orthodoxy in congressional testimony are themselves major producers, and they have a direct interest in keeping supply short to hold their crude prices high.

#### NO FREE MARKET AT PUMP, EITHER

Wait, you say, doesn't that raise their cost of making gasoline? Yes, but so what? There is no free market at the pump, either.

Thanks to the rash of mergers that Washington has allowed, gasoline refining is oligopolized, too – and guess what? The big refiners are now slashing their output of gasoline to keep supply low and prices rising.

Also, notice that pump prices are the same at Exxon, Shell and other major stations. If a free market really existed, at least one of them would try to attract customers by cutting prices.

By locking up supply, these oil barons are able to rob us – and that's another reason America must push alternatives to oil.

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# Evangelicals Seek Political Bow-Out

By Ed Studda

A group of U.S. evangelical leaders have called for a pullback from party politics so that followers would not become “useful idiots” exploited for partisan gain.

One in four U.S. adults count themselves as evangelical Protestants, giving them serious clout in a country where religion and politics often mix. Conservative evangelicals have become a key support base for the Republican Party.

But the movement has had growing pains and the statement called an “Evangelical Manifesto,” is the latest sign of emerging fractures as some activists seek to broaden its agenda beyond hot-button social issues such as opposition to abortion and gay rights.

## POLITICIZING RELIGION A MISTAKE

“Christians from both sides of the political spectrum, left as well as right, have made the mistake of politicizing faith,” the manifesto declares.

“That way faith loses its independence, the church becomes ‘the regime at prayer,’ Christians become ‘useful idiots’ for one political party or another, and the Christian faith becomes an ideology in its purest form,” it said.

The manifesto was signed by leading and mostly centrist evangelicals such as Leith Anderson, president of the 30 million-member National Association of Evangelicals and Mark Bailey, president of the Dallas Theological Seminary.

Many of the more than 70 signatories have been critical in the past of evangelical partisan involvement that was seen as the crucial element behind President George W. Bush’s re-election victory in 2004.

## TONY PERKINS NOT ASKED TO SIGN

Leading figures on the conservative “Religious Right” such as Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, did not sign the document and his office said he had not been asked to sign it. Perkins is a James Dobson creation.

Michael Cromartie, vice president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, said of the statement: “It’s a sign of maturation of the evangelical movement ... It’s an important theological document but it will have limited political influence

# McCain Leading U.S. To Eternal Gramm-nation

By Jim Hightower

“Tell me with whom you walk, and I’ll tell you who you are,” goes the old adage.

By that wisdom, John McCain is Phil Gramm, which is another way of saying he’s Wall Street and corporate America.

Not only has McCain filled his campaign staff with big-business lobbyists, but he’s also put such corporate-minded characters as Gramm by his side as top policy advisors, walking in step with them.

You might remember Phil as the right-wing Texas senator who chaired the Senate banking committee. He rammed through a Wall Street deregulation bill that suddenly let powerhouse investment banks move into exotic financial schemes that were balanced precariously atop predatory subprime mortgages.

## WHERE DID GRAMM END UP?

Having been the magical congressional alchemist for this rapacious scheme of turning poor people’s home-ownership dreams into Wall Street gold, Gramm left the Senate to go – where else? – to Wall Street!

For the past six years, he’s been vice president and top lobbyist for UBS, one of the world’s largest investment banks and a major player in the subprime mortgage game. Unfortunately, that game has gone very badly, and as a result, UBS has posted \$37 billion in losses in just the past six months. Thanks, Phil.

But disastrous economic failure hasn’t daunted Gramm, who has been McCain’s national campaign co-chair and financial policy guru from the start, even though he continued lobbying for UBS.

Now, he’s walking McCain over the economic cliff, having developed the GOP candidate’s recent policy of coldly dismissing relief for duped borrowers and rejecting public regulation of Wall Street’s profiteering schemes. Guru Gramm is also pushing McCain to raise America’s retirement age, privatize Social Security and further deregulate Wall Street.

Did I mention that Gramm is in line to be Treasury secretary if McCain wins? And that, my friends, is who John McCain is.

## DISOBEDIENCE BEGINS AT 60

There’s an old cliché that smug right-wingers like to fling at us: “If you’re not a liberal at 20, you have no heart. But if you’re not a conservative at 40, you have no brain.”

Even if that’s true, there’s a third phrase in life that should be added to this aphorism: “If you’re not a radical at 60, you haven’t been paying attention.”

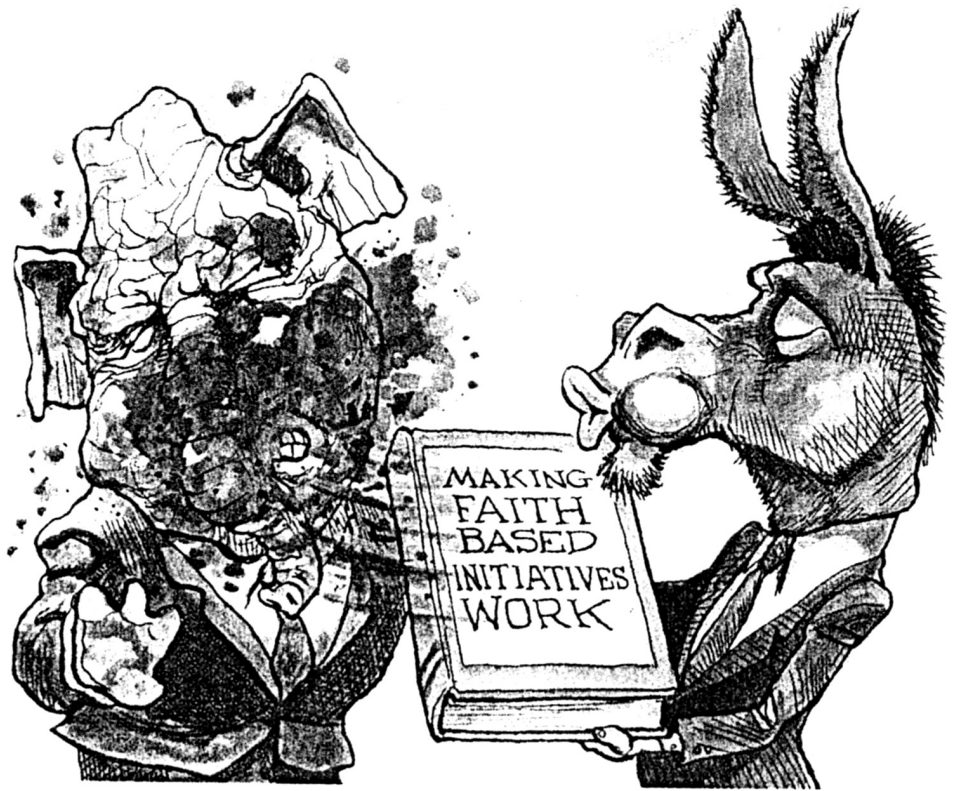
Ours is a culture that celebrates youth – which is not a bad thing at all, since there is a freshness and idealism in the young that gives our society spark.

Yet oldsters, too, bring something special to the cause, for they are in a unique position to question authority, defy the corporate order and stand up for progressive values.

Also – let’s face it – the clock is ticking, so it’s definitely time to break loose, make a difference ... and have some fun being disobedient!

## MEET THE ‘AGING AGITATORS’

I was reminded of this enormous possibility for seniors to buck the system when I attended an event in Los Angeles recently with a group of old folks who



because it is making essentially a theological argument.”

## AIMING TOWARD POVERTY, CLIMATE CHANGE

The document also highlights divisions that have been there for a while as some leading evangelicals attempt to redirect the movement’s considerable energies toward areas such as action on global poverty and climate change.

Analysts say most are still center-right politically and polls consistently show most remain opposed to abortion rights. They are also deeply committed to their faith.

“We have a big umbrella called evangelicalism which is theological in nature. We are called to be followers of Jesus Christ and men and women of the book,” said John Huffman, a pastor and chairman of the board of Christianity Today.

Huffman, who helped draft the document, told Reuters by telephone that the group wanted to bring back “civility of discourse in the public square.”

proudly call themselves “aging agitators.” They work through an organization called Sunset Hall, and its members range from blue-collar retirees to people from the entertainment world.

Sunset Hall is not a place for the sedentary – it is an activist organization.

Many of its members came through labor battles, challenged Joe McCarthy, marched with Martin Luther King Jr., protested the Vietnam War, helped found the modern women’s movement and pushed environmental issues to the fore. They are not about to sit back now.

Instead, they continue to put their gray heads on the line, both for local and international issues, and they reach out to younger activists who might need a little support, guidance and old-time oomph.

Being an agitator is all about attitude – not age. Connect with these freethinking elders at [www.sunsethall.org](http://www.sunsethall.org).

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## From Indian Wisdom To The Bureaucracy

The tribal wisdom of the Dakota Indians, passed on from generation to generation was: “When you discover you are riding a dead horse the best strategy is to dismount.”

However, in bureaucratic government and corporate America, more advanced strategies are often employed, such as:

- Buying a stronger whip.
- Changing riders.
- Appointing a committee to study the horse.
- Arranging to visit other countries to see how other cultures ride horses.
- Lowering the standards so that dead horses can be included.
- Reclassifying the dead horse as living impaired.
- Hiring outside contractors to ride the dead horse.
- Harnessing several dead horses to get increased speed.
- Providing additional funding and/or training to increase dead horse’s performance.
- Doing a productivity study to see if lighter riders would improve the dead horse’s performance.
- Declaring that as the dead horse does not have to be fed, it is less costly, carries lower overhead and therefore contributes substantially more to the bottom line of the economy than live horses.
- Rewriting the expected performance requirements for all horses.
- And our favorite: Promoting the dead horse to a supervisory position.

# McCain Would Spy On Citizens

If elected president, Sen. John McCain would reserve the right to run his own warrantless wiretapping program against Americans, based on the theory that the president's wartime powers trump federal criminal statutes and court oversight, according to a statement released by his campaign.

McCain's new tack towards the Bush Administration's theory of executive power came less than two weeks after a McCain surrogate stated, incorrectly it seems, that the senator wanted hearings into telecom companies' cooperation with President Bush's warrantless wiretapping program, before he'd support giving those companies retroactive legal immunity.

## SPOKESMAN SAID STRICTER RULES NEEDED

As first reported by Threat Level, Chuck Fish, a full-time lawyer for the McCain campaign, also said McCain wanted stricter rules on how the nation's telecoms work with U.S. spy agencies, and expected those companies to apologize for any lawbreaking before winning amnesty.

But McCain adviser Doug Holtz-Eakin, speaking for the campaign, disavowed those statements, and for the first time cast McCain's views on warrantless wiretapping as identical to Bush's.

Neither the Administration nor the telecoms need apologize for actions that most people, except for the ACLU and the trial lawyers, understand were Constitutional and appropriate in the wake of the attacks, he said.

## OOPS! HE ADOPTS A NEW LINE

"We do not know what lies ahead in our nation's fight against radical Islamic extremists, but John McCain will do everything he can to protect Americans from such threats, including asking the telecoms for appropriate assistance to collect intelligence against foreign threats to the United States as authorized by Article II of the Constitution," he said.

The Article II citation is key, since it refers to President Bush's long-standing arguments that the president has nearly unlimited powers during a time of war.



The administration's analysis went so far as to say the Fourth Amendment did not apply inside the United States in the fight against terrorism, in one legal opinion from 2001.

## A DELIBERATE CONTRADICTION

McCain's new position plainly contradicts statements he made in a Dec. 20, 2007 interview with the Boston Globe where he implicitly criticized Bush's five-year secret end-run around the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

"I think that presidents have the obligation to obey and enforce laws that are passed by Congress and signed into law by the president, no matter what the situation is," McCain said.

The Globe's Charlie Savage pushed further, asking, "So is that a no, in other words, federal statute trumps inherent power in that case, warrantless surveillance?"

To which McCain answered, "I don't think the president has the right to disobey any law."

# A Major Hurdle For Obama? Racism

By Susan Estrich

Everyone knows what the "right" answer is to the question of whether you would be willing to vote for an African-American for president. The "right" answer is yes.

What's surprising is not how many people say yes, but how many don't.

According to a recent Rasmussen Reports poll, 78% of all Americans said yes to that question, leaving 22% admitting either that they would not be willing to vote for an African-American [11%] or aren't sure [the other 11%].

Of course, since everyone knows what the "right" answer is, if you really want to know how much race matters, you don't ask people what they'd be willing to do; you ask them about their family, friends and co-workers.

The question is not whether you are what most of us would consider to be a racist, but whether other people you know are. Easier to admit that way. And that's when you get the most disturbing finding of the Rasmussen poll.

## AMERICA'S RACE PROBLEM

Knowing that you're supposed to say yes, knowing that political correctness, not to mention evenhandedness and fairness, counsel that the answer to your willingness to vote for an African-American is supposed to be "yes," 17% of white voters say that their family, friends and co-workers would not vote for an African-American and 26% more just aren't sure.

Not sure if your best friends are racist? Nice. That totals up to more than 40% - more than four in 10.

If four in 10 white Americans are willing to admit to a pollster that their friends, family and co-workers might not vote for an African-American because of his race, how many really hold that view? More.

Now maybe, given the current political situation, when people hear the question, they believe it really means: Are you willing to vote for Barack Obama? Maybe all those people saying "no" or "not sure" would be giving a different answer if the Republican Party were about to nominate Colin Powell.

Maybe some of this is about Obama, and not about race, per se.

Or maybe not.

## GRIM REALITY FOR OBAMA?

In any event, it doesn't matter. Obama is the one who's running, and to anyone who thinks racism is part of our history and not our current reality, look again.

Right now, Obama is running well behind the generic Democrat, and McCain is running well ahead of the generic Republican.

That means when people are asked about supporting Democrats for Congress, the generic Democrat for Congress does as well as 15 points better than the real-life Democratic candidate for president.

It means McCain does better than the Republican brand, maybe because people like him more than they do Republicans generally, or maybe because they like Obama less than they do Democrats generally.

Either way, it spells a major challenge.

## TRADITION OF MISLEADING POLLSTERS

There is a long tradition of people lying to pollsters about their support for African-American candidates. Remember California Gov. Tom Bradley? Not. He was way ahead in every poll, right up to and including election day. The only one he lost was the secret ballot that actually counted.

We saw the same phenomenon in a number of pre-primary and exit polls in big states this year, where Obama was supposed to be closing the gap, or even taking the lead, and then lost in the actual balloting to Hillary Clinton by comfortable margins.

It got to the point that I started ignoring the warning lights on the Drudge Report on primary Tuesdays at 5 p.m., showing contests that Hillary ended up winning comfortably to be too close to call. They weren't. People were just lying.

Obama is who he is. He can run a campaign that transcends race; he can reach out to white voters; he can keep away from his former pastor and his former church. But he can't change his race and he shouldn't try.

Nor can he change, in a mere five months, racial prejudices that are so deeply ingrained that four in 10 white voters aren't even embarrassed enough to lie about them.

## NO MARGIN FOR ERROR

Still, no candidate wants to be in the position where you have to win the votes of every person - or even five out of six of them - who might consider voting for you. That's too little room for disagreement. It's why high negatives are such a problem.

At the end of the day, for better and for worse, what most voters care about is themselves, their own lives and their families. Obama's challenge is not to convince them to change their minds about race, or racism, but to put themselves first.

With the price of gas approaching five dollars, unemployment at record highs, the war dragging on and the housing market slumping, taking race into account might just be a luxury that less well-off Americans, who are the ones most likely to do it, simply can't afford.

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## Yes, She Was Broke

A little old lady answered a knock on the door one day, only to be confronted by a well-dressed young man carrying a vacuum cleaner.

"Good morning," said the young man. "If I could take a couple of minutes of your time, I would like to demonstrate the very latest in high-powered vacuum cleaners."

"Go away!" said the old lady. "I'm broke and haven't got any money!" And she proceeded to close the door.

Quick as a flash, the young man wedged his foot in the door and pushed it wide open.

"Don't be too hasty!" he said. "Not until you have at least seen my demonstration."

And with that, he emptied a bucket of horse manure onto her hallway carpet. "If this vacuum cleaner does not remove all traces of this horse manure from your carpet, Madam, I will personally eat the remainder."

The old lady stepped back and said, "Well, let me get you a fork, 'cause they cut off my electricity this morning."

# Glass Ceiling Still There In The Media

By Miren Gutierrez

Observe any summit photo – you won't find many women. The mystery of female under-representation in the echelons of power persists.

After so many decades of the feminist movement, why are women at the helm scarce? A look at the media sector may provide some answers.

"The media is a mirror on society so it needs to be a reflection of that society," says Ferial Haffajee, the first woman editor of the South African Mail & Guardian.

Media organizations are the gatekeepers of much of what is known in the public sphere, while journalistic stories contribute to perpetuating stereotypes, or changing them. It is quite revealing, then, to find out who is in the kitchen cooking the news.

## JOURNALISM IS THE BIG PROBLEM

"The influence of women in journalism is one of the most central problem areas in feminist media research," acknowledges a recent report entitled "The Gender of Journalism," authored by researcher Monika Djerf-Pierre.

Djerf-Pierre's study shows that even in a female-friendly nation such as Sweden "journalism as a field has remained male-dominated."

Sweden ranks No. 1 – or the country with the narrowest disparity – in the Global Gender Gap [GGG] published by the World Economic Forum.

Only in two sectors, public broadcasting and magazines, do women fill more than 40% of leadership positions.

## MEN ARE FAVORED IN COVERAGE

Djerf-Pierre explains that a general pattern – she calls it "gender logic" – persists: men typically cover the public sphere of politics, business, and power, speaking to male sources and assuming the mantle of objectivity.

Women tend to cover the private sphere, drawing on female sources and writing in a more intimate style.

According to a survey published in 2005 mentioned in her report, "many women journalists ... feel that women are at a disadvantage when stories are assigned, but say at the same time that gender has no importance with respect to how a desk chief performs his or her job."

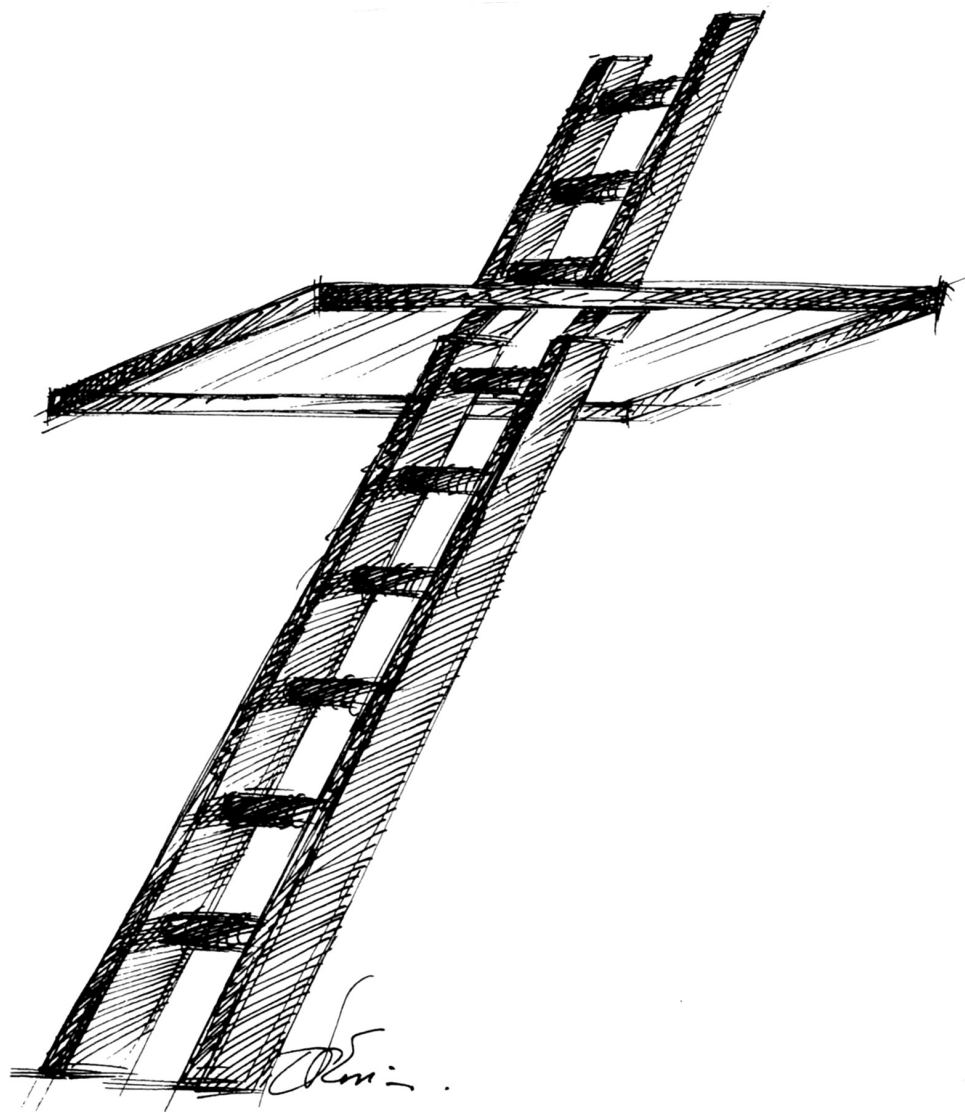
## AMERICA RANKS POORLY IN GENDER BIAS

Similar patterns emerge in the U.S. [GGG rank 31], which is in a worse position regarding equality.

A study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 2006 showed that the number of women executives has stagnated in this sector.

"The percentage of women in daily newsrooms increased slightly to 37.7%, but 64.5% of all supervisors are men. They are also 58.5% of all copy editors, 60.3% of reporters and 72.6% of photographers," says the study.

"Women have reached the proverbial glass ceiling in the media," proclaims the International Women's Media Foundation [IWMF] in its 2006-07 report.



Part of the reason could be that women are frustrated with their progress.

## MANY POISED TO LEAVE JOURNALISM

A study by the American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism documented a brain drain among women who didn't anticipate moving up in their organizations and thought they might leave journalism.

The group Media Report to Women, a provider of information about how media depicts women, cites a 2006 study by the Atlantic, Harper's, The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker and Vanity Fair, which found a 3-1 ratio of male to female bylines.

The American Journalist Survey, released in 2003 by Indiana University, showed that female journalists' median salary in 2001 was about 81% of men's salary of \$46,758. The wage gap widened as journalists grew older.

# REAL MCCAIN

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resulted in Clinton receiving far more criticism for pandering than McCain did.

So the season has come for anti-McCain books from detractors. Whether the three under review here have any impact on the election discourse will depend, to some extent, on the course of events and the effectiveness of the Democratic fall campaign.

But each of the three – all follow the same basic template of critically reassessing the stages of McCain's career – makes persuasive arguments that while there has been much to respect in McCain in the past, there remain today only shards and vestiges of that man; that in doing what he had to do to become the nominee of a party of orthodox conservatism, he has so sublimated his honorable instincts that they have all but atrophied.

He's not only adopted domestic policy positions he'd long opposed, he has openly pandered to the conservative Republican base by supporting most of Bush's positions in legislation on the treatment of detainees.

## THE MCCAIN MYTH UNMASKED

As the Bush years progressed and he began to prepare for 2008, there were aspects to McCain's personality and career that didn't quite fit the mythic public persona.

First of all, we have the matter of his famous temper. This has received press attention from time to time. But it hasn't really hurt him, because it's so easy to spin "violent temper" into "passionate beliefs" and make it sound positive.

Brock and Waldman, Welch, and Cliff Schecter each write at length on McCain's anger, cataloguing instances of him popping off at fellow senators and others and holding grudges for long periods of time, and then denying flatly in on-the-record quotes that he ever loses his temper or holds a grudge.

Schecter, a freelance liberal commentator who contributes frequently to The Huffington Post, recounts, for the first time, a tale – confirmed to him, he writes, by three Arizona reporters – that in 1992, after Cindy McCain teased her husband about his thinning hair, McCain snapped at her, in front of the reporters and two staffers: "At least I don't plaster on the makeup like a trollop, you c----." One wonders if on such occasions she reminds her husband who it was that made his political career possible. She has recently called the idea that her husband

has a temper "a concoction."

## THE ART OF FLIP-FLOPPING

The second issue is more substantive and deals with McCain's policy record – both his votes as a senator and the positions he's taking as presidential candidate. In many matters, it is far from consistent.

Schecter's *The Real McCain* chronicles, in fine-grain detail, McCain's votes and positions, showing that they often seem to reflect hypocrisy, flip-flopping, and pure expediency, rather than the political courage for which he is famous.

There is a final matter about McCain, the new and reinvented McCain, that the press hasn't quite taken in.

The McCain of 1999 and 2000 was running a campaign that was also a movement. His most famous quote from those days, which he used repeatedly, invoked the idea of public service and usually went something like this, from a commencement speech at Boston College in 2006:

*Those who claim their liberty but not their duty to the civilization that ensures it, live a half-life, having indulged their self-interest at the cost of their self-respect. But sacrifice for a cause greater than your self-interest, and you invest your lives with the eminence of that cause, your self-respect assured.*

## THE CALL TO SACRIFICE

This belief was at the core of his earlier campaign. Welch, an editorial-page editor at the Los Angeles Times of libertarian bent and a former editor at Reason magazine, devotes considerable space to exploring this aspect of McCain's professed values. His book is the best of the three.

The other two, though useful, would have little rationale if McCain weren't a presidential candidate; but Welch has produced a thorough critique that digs deep into McCain's belief system and will have a shelf life beyond this election cycle.

As a libertarian, Welch finds the above quotation about "sacrifice" monstrous, a prettily packaged recipe for putting the people before the individual and trampling liberty. But it was something that I think many journalists and liberals and especially young people found appealing.

See UNMASKED Page 15

# Following McCain's Logic Is Most Taxing

By Steve Wamhoff

We thought it was difficult to keep track of the tax positions of all the GOP presidential candidates. But with the GOP primary over, we're finding that wasn't nearly as difficult as keeping track of the tax positions of one particular candidate: John McCain.

Now that the Arizona Senator is the Republican nominee, it's worth asking what sorts of tax policies he would push for as President. Our honest answer: We have no idea.

He has held several views and his recent explanations don't quite explain his various policy permutations.

As our Congressional report card covering the years 2001-06 shows, Citizens for Tax Justice [CTJ] has given McCain an "A" in some years and an "F" in other years. But one might think that the "real" John McCain could be found by digging deeper, farther back into his history.

## MCCAIN'S PRE-PRESIDENTIAL RECORD

So it's worth looking at McCain's record before he ran for president in 2000. As explained in a report issued by CTJ on the senator's record back then, McCain often voted against bills that would reduce the deficit by closing tax loopholes [apparently "pork" is OK in his eyes if it's done through the tax code] or raising tax rates.

He did vote in favor of the sweeping revenue-neutral tax reform bill in 1986 [along with an almost unanimous Senate], but after the Republicans took over Congress in the 1990s, he sided with his party on bills to provide unaffordable and unnecessary tax cuts.

During his campaign for president in 2000 and for quite a while thereafter, something strange happened to John McCain. He strongly opposed the most central planks in the GOP platform and the driving force behind the conservative movement: tax cuts.

Specifically, McCain was one of only two Republican senators to vote against both the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts.

It is hard to exaggerate how amazing these votes are, since tax cuts have been the main policy proposal offered by Republican presidential candidates in almost every election since 1980.

## MCCAIN'S CHANGES OF HEART

Then, as he contemplated another run for the presidency, McCain had another change of heart.

The key provision of the 2003 tax cut bill that he had opposed was the tax cut for capital gains and dividends. But in 2005 he voted for the budget reconciliation bill that extended that very gift to the wealthy for an additional two years.

McCain had earlier complained that "repeal of the estate tax would provide massive benefits solely to the wealthiest and highest-income taxpayers in the country," but in 2006 he decided that repealing most of the estate tax was just fine by him.

He voted that year for the bill to gut the estate tax, which won a majority of votes in the Senate but failed to obtain the 60 votes needed for passage.

## LIVING ON THE PARTY LINE

Now McCain has fully channeled his party's orthodoxy against taxes on the



wealthy. He now wants to make the Bush tax cuts permanent. He wants to slash the corporate tax rate from 35% to 25% [even though the tax "burden" on corporations in the United States is already among the lowest in industrialized countries].

Now, it would be one thing if John McCain actually offered some "straight talk" to explain all this. If he simply said he was wrong, or he was temporarily blinded by his rage at the GOP, that would be at least understandable.

But instead, he has offered an explanation so convoluted that it defies belief, a ludicrous proposition that we can raise revenue by cutting taxes?

John McCain now says that he opposed the Bush tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 because he thought they needed to be accompanied by cuts in spending to keep the budget deficit under control.

Actually, what he said in 2000 about then-Gov. George W. Bush's tax plan was, "I don't think the governor's tax cut is too big - it's just misplaced. Sixty percent of the benefits from his tax cuts go to the wealthiest 10% of Americans - and that's not the kind of tax relief that Americans need."

## STRAIGHT TALK ON DEFICITS?

But for the sake of argument let's just take his word that he was concerned about budget deficits. How does he explain his position now, since the deficit is worse than ever?

Here's a typical answer given by McCain: He explained at a debate Sept. 5 that he voted against the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts because they did not include cuts in spending, which he thought were also necessary. But at the same time, he also makes the claim that "it's very clear that the increase in revenue we've experienced is directly related to the tax cuts that were enacted, and they need to be permanent."

This is both baffling and astounding.

It's baffling because if tax cuts actually could cause revenues to increase, then we would never need to cut spending ever. In fact, we could cut taxes and the resulting new revenue could be used for increased spending!

But it's also astounding because even Bush's Treasury Department has admitted [in a report released in 2006] that tax cuts cannot possibly pay for themselves. Sure, lower taxes might create some incentive to work and invest, resulting in some more income and thus more tax revenue, but that will never make up for more than a small fraction of the cost of a tax cut.

Does McCain believe, contrary to almost every mainstream economist, the ludicrous proposition that we can raise revenue by cutting taxes? Or has he been altering his view to win over an extreme fringe within his party to win its nomination?

So we have a riddle, and like any ancient sphinx, John McCain is not giving any clear answers.

- The author is Citizens For Tax Justice's legislative director. This article originally appeared in CTJ's Tax Justice Digest.

# UNMASKED

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David Foster Wallace certainly loved it, and he points out in his essay that the idea was part-and-parcel of the whole McCain package - the straight talk and the POW years conferred upon McCain a legitimacy to demand sacrifice of citizens, and his credentials made the call real and not "just one more piece of the carefully scripted bulls--- that presidential candidates hand us as they go about the self-interested business of trying to become" president.

McCain says he believes in the "beautiful fatalism" of noble lost causes, and he confounded reporters in 2000 by exhibiting apprehension after his New Hampshire win and relief after his South Carolina defeat. Such responses captivated many people.

That McCain is probably still in there somewhere, if you dig deep enough. But the McCain we see publicly now is determined to do anything he has to do to win.

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# Monica Killed The Clinton-Gingrich Pact

In public, they were oil and water. As president, Bill Clinton distrusted then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich, and the Republican felt the same way about Clinton.

But in a shocking revelation, we're learning that the political foes - desperate for a heroic legacy - made a secret pact to fix the nation's most problematic programs like Social Security.

The plan crashed, however, in the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

"Monica changed everything," says former Clinton Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles.

It was in 1997, when the budget was flush and partisanship at a lull, says Steven Gillon, a History Channel host and University of Oklahoma professor who reveals the deal in his page-turner, *The Pact*.

"This was a moment where everything came together to create this possibility in 1997-98," he says. "Those circumstances will probably never be duplicated."

Using Gingrich's notes and interviews with Bowles and other Clintonistas, he describes months of meetings leading to a face-to-face in the Treaty Room on Oct. 28, 1997.

The plan: Clinton would propose fixing Social Security and Gingrich would back it. Both would work their sides to pass it after the 1998 elections. Other deals would follow.

But the Lewinsky saga broke first, returning partisanship.

"It really did matter, and it destroyed this moment of bipartisanship that both of them had worked hard for," says Gillon.

- U.S. News & World Report

## Health Study Report

# Disparities In Care By Race And Region

Race and place of residence can have a staggering impact on the course and quality of the medical treatment a patient receives, according to new research.

It shows that blacks with diabetes or vascular disease are nearly five times more likely than whites to have a leg amputated. Women in Mississippi are far less likely to have mammograms than those in Maine.

The study, by researchers at Dartmouth, examined Medicare claims for evidence of racial and geographic disparities

They found that on a variety of quality indices, blacks typically were less likely to receive recommended care than whites within a given region. But the most striking disparities were found from place to place.

### MAMMOGRAM RATES WIDEST

For instance, the widest racial gaps in mammogram rates within a state were in California and Illinois, with a difference of 12 percentage points between the white rate and the black rate.

The country's lowest rate for blacks – 48% in California – was 24 percentage points below the highest rate – 72% in Massachusetts. The statistics were for women ages 65 to 69 who received screening in 2004 or 2005.

In all but two states, black diabetics were less likely than whites to receive annual hemoglobin testing. But blacks in Colorado [66%] were far less likely to be screened than those in Massachusetts [88%].

### THREE-YEAR INITIATIVE ANNOUNCED

The study was commissioned by the nation's largest health-related philanthropy, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which announced a three-year, \$300 million initiative intended to narrow health care disparities across lines of race and geography.

Officials said it would be the largest effort to improve health care quality ever undertaken by a charity in the United States.

The foundation hopes to better understand and confront the causes of those regional variations by focusing its spending on 14 regions, like the city of Memphis and the state of Wisconsin.

### TO STUDY HEART ATTACK PATIENTS

Dr. Bruce Siegel, the George Washington University professor who will direct the program, said one community might use its grant money to study how long it takes hospitals to move heart attack patients from emergency room to catheterization laboratory.

Others might work to coordinate electronic record-keeping or to provide patients with better information about taking medications after discharge.

"In my book," Dr. Siegel said, "health care is local, just like politics, so you're going to see a lot of differences in what communities do."

That point is reinforced time and again in the new research conducted by the Dartmouth Atlas Project of the college's Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice.

### MEDICARE DATA IS USED

It used Medicare data to document health care disparities over the last two decades. It found substantial variation in the proportion of Medicare beneficiaries who had been seen in a two-year period by a primary care physician, ranging from 86% in Nebraska and South Dakota to 65% in New Jersey.

It found far higher rates of unnecessary hospitalizations in Hawaii, Utah and



Washington than in Kentucky, Louisiana and West Virginia.

Disparities in the rate of leg amputations were particularly stark. The rate for blacks was about 6 per 1,000 in Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina, but less than 2 per 1,000 in Colorado and Nevada.

### DISPARITY INCLUDES WHITES

The rates for whites in the three southern states were much lower, about 1.3 per 1,000, but were still more than double the rates for whites in the two western states.

Such variations may be partly explained by regional differences in education and poverty levels, but researchers increasingly believe that variations in medical practice and spending also are factors.

"In U.S. health care, it's not only who you are that matters; it's also where you live," wrote the study's authors, led by Dr. Elliott S. Fisher.

Dr. John R. Lumpkin, senior vice president of the foundation, said that more than a third of the \$300 million would be spent to hire national experts to help regional coalitions tailor their quality improvement plans.

The remainder of the money will be devoted to research, evaluation and the promotion of quality standards.

### BUILDING A TEMPLATE

"We want to build a template in each of these communities that will teach America how to improve health care quality in a dramatic way," Dr. Lumpkin said.

The areas selected for the grants are Cincinnati; Cleveland; Detroit; Humboldt County, CA; Kansas City, MO; Maine; Memphis; Minnesota; Seattle; south central Pennsylvania; western Michigan; western New York; Willamette Valley in Oregon; and Wisconsin.

The foundation's endowment, now about \$10 billion, was financed originally from the wealth of its namesake, who died in 1968 after building Johnson & Johnson into one of the world's largest sellers of health and medical products.

The group has been a major force in curbing tobacco use, and has more recently turned its attention to obesity, announcing a five-year, \$500 million effort on that front last year.

# Health Care Costs Continue Soaring

By Norman Soloman

It's kind of logical. In a pathological way.

A country that devotes a vast array of resources to killing capabilities will steadily undermine its potential for healing. For social justice. For health care as a human right.

Martin Luther King Jr. described the horrific trend-line four decades ago: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

If a society keeps approaching spiritual death, it's apt to arrive. Here's an indicator: Nearly one in six Americans has no health insurance, and tens of millions of others are badly underinsured.

### WE BLOW IT ON MILITARY AFFAIRS

Here's another: The United States, the world's preeminent warfare state, now spends about \$2 billion per day on military pursuits.

Gaining health care for all will require overcoming the priorities of the warfare state. That's the genuine logic behind the new "Health Care NOT Warfare" campaign.

I remember the ferocious media debate over the proper government role in health care – 43 years ago. As the spring of 1965 got underway, the bombast was splattering across front pages and flying through airwaves.

Many commentators warned that a proposal for a vast new program would bring "socialism" and destroy the sanctity of the free-enterprise system. The new federal program was called Medicare.

### MOST STUDENTS LIKE THE IDEA

These days, when speaking on campuses, I bring up current proposals for a "single payer" system – in effect, Medicare for Americans of all ages.

Most students seem to think it's a good idea. But once in a while, someone vocally objects that such an arrangement would be "socialism." The objection takes me back to the media uproar of early 1965.

Today, we're left with the unfulfilled potential of Medicare for all. It could make health care real as a human right. And it could spare our society a massive amount of money now going to administrative costs and corporate gouging.

At last count, annual insurance-industry profits reached \$57.5 billion in 2006.

On Capitol Hill, lobbyists for the corporate profiteers are determined to block HR 676, the bill to create a universal single-payer system to implement health care as a human right.

### CANDIDATES DON'T ADDRESS THE ISSUE

In the current presidential campaign, none of the major candidates can be heard raising the possibility of ejecting the gargantuan insurance industry from the nation's health care system.

Instead, there's plenty of nattering about whether "mandates" are a good idea. A recent New York Times story was authoritative as it plied the conventional media wisdom. The lead sentence declared that an "immediate challenge that will confront the next administration" is the matter of "how to tame the soaring costs of Medicare and Medicaid."

The news article pointedly noted that current federal spending for those health-related programs adds up to \$627 billion.

I've been waiting for a New York Times news story to declare that an immediate challenge for the next administration will be the matter of how to tame the soar-

See SOARING Page 17

# Billions Up In Smoke In Costly Drug War

Smoke a joint and your whole family could end up homeless. Drug addiction is bad. But the war on drugs is worse.

The Washington Post printed a heart-breaking story that exemplifies the wasteful and counter-productive way our society deals with illegal drug use.

Frances Johnson is a 68-year-old grandmother in Washington, DC, who faces eviction simply because her grandson was arrested for possessing a small amount of marijuana.

The federal government's public housing system has a "one strike and you're out" policy for any drug law violation – even if that violation occurs miles away from home.

How does our society benefit from making homeless a whole family because of a little bit of marijuana?

## WHAT DID SHE DO WRONG?

Why are we punishing Frances Johnson who herself did nothing wrong?

Does anyone really believe such draconian policies will help reduce marijuana use? How will an eviction affect her grandson's chances for recovery?

Should any family be kicked out of their home for a loved one's drug use?

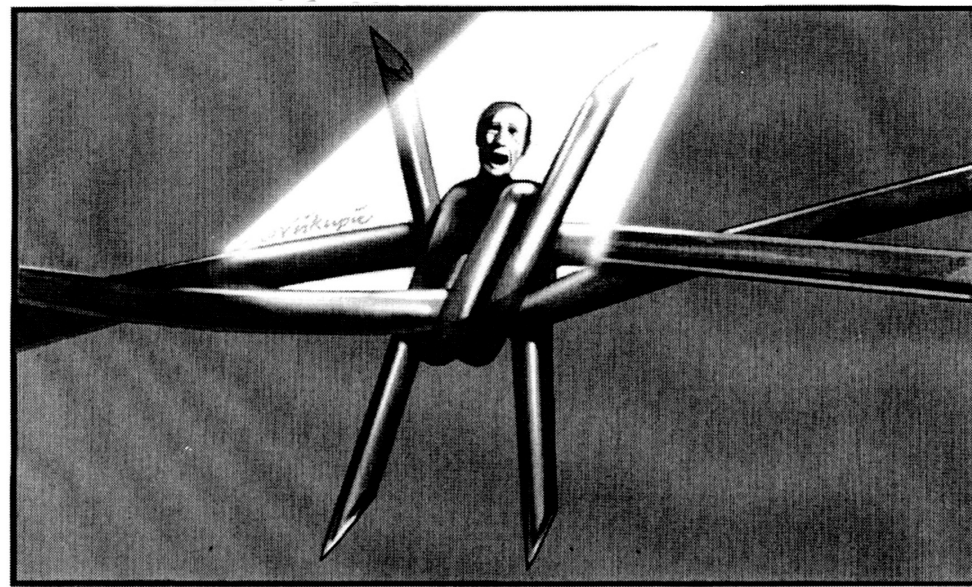
Though they contain no racist language, the application of the government's zero tolerance prohibition policies is overtly racist, classist, ineffective and inhumane.

The New York Civil Liberties Union released a report last month that found 83% of those charged with marijuana possession over the last 10 years are black or Latino even though federal surveys show that whites are more likely to use pot.

## THE ENTIRE FAMILY IS PUNISHED

If you are poor and live in public housing, your whole family is punished for a drug offense – even for smoking a joint. But if you are middle class and do not rely on public housing or other benefits, it is a "personal" issue.

Even though we arrested a staggering 800,000 people for marijuana last year,



marijuana is as easily available as ever – to find some, just inquire around your local high school.

For 40 years, we have been waging a "war on drugs." Just what does our \$40 billion a year drug war get us?

Our prisons are exploding with nonviolent drug offenders; families are kicked out of housing when many have done nothing wrong; thousands die from street violence generated by prohibition's lucrative black market; and drugs remain as plentiful and easy to obtain as ever.

Enough is enough. Frances Johnson should not be more "collateral damage" from this unwinnable war.

The Oklahoma Observer is not crusading in favor of drug use. But why is Oklahoma spending \$22,000 per prisoner who used or sold marijuana? Drug court helps but not enough.

How about a fine, community service and drug rehab? That would save Oklahomans millions a year and prevent creating another generation of career criminals.

# Dems Losing Opportunity On Health Care?

By Froma Harrop

A remarkable thing just happened in the people's party. Democrats have chosen a candidate, in the year 2008, who does not have a plan for universal health coverage.

Barack Obama caresses the words "universal coverage" almost hourly, but his proposal offers nothing of the kind – unlike the plans of Hillary Clinton, John Edwards and other Democratic hopefuls.

Most striking, the man who showed such timidity on health care became the hero of ardent progressives. So forgiving was their love of Mr. Big that they virtually abandoned what should have been the Democrats' most potent promise: medical coverage for all.

This is political opportunity lost. In a new CNN/Opinion Research Corp. poll, 49% of registered voters list the economy as their No. 1 issue, with the Iraq war second at 19%. Health care comes in a close third at 14%.

## BOTH ECONOMIC, SOCIAL IMPERATIVE

Make no mistake: A universal health-care system is an economic as well as social imperative – the idea that in a rich country, no one should go without medical care.

The lack of one hurts Americans' ability to compete with foreigners whose governments have controlled national health-care costs and achieved better average medical outcomes through their national systems of universal coverage.

So how are voters to compare the health-care proposals of Obama and presumptive Republican candidate John McCain?

McCain proposes tax credits for families to buy their own coverage. This is not the freshest of ideas, though he does call for federal aid to help states cover sick people rejected by private insurers. McCain opposes a mandate requiring everyone to get health insurance.

## MANDATING FOR CHILDREN ONLY

And so does Obama. He would insist that all children have health coverage, but not adults. As he said during the recent campaign, "Sen. Clinton believes the only way to achieve universal health care is to force everybody to purchase it."

Thing is, a system based on private coverage that doesn't force everyone to participate is, by definition, not universal. What happens is that the young and healthy don't bother buying in. [They figure that they can always glom onto a taxpayer supported program, should they face a medical crisis.]

The inevitable result is that the government programs fill with expensive patients, while the hearty souls – who in any coherent system subsidize their sick neighbors – get to sit on the sidelines.

This is a disaster in the making.

## OBAMA'S ARGUMENT SPECIOUS?

The logic of Obama's argument isn't great, either.

His line about Hillary forcing people to buy insurance was followed by this: "And my belief is, the reason that people don't have it is not because they don't want it but because they can't afford it."

Well, if his plan makes health insurance affordable, why can't everyone afford

it?

For the record, McCain also vows to make coverage affordable for all. And although his more free-market approach to health care can't possibly deliver on this [without spending a lot more than he says he will], the McCain vision stands on a sturdier reality.

## ENROLL EVERYONE IN MEDICARE

The best idea is to enroll all Americans in Medicare. This would be much simpler and administratively cheaper than either the McCain or Obama [or Clinton] plan.

As it now does for the elderly, Medicare would pick up most of the hospital and physician bills for everybody. An expanded Medicare would free businesses from the burden of providing medical care to employees and their kin.

Obama's health-care plan looks like a back-of-the-napkin scribbling by someone who didn't care all that much but needed something.

How curious that out of the smoke and drama of the Democratic race, there emerged a "candidate of change" whose health-care proposal is not universal, much less bold.

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# SOARING

From Page 16

ing costs of the Pentagon.

## MILITARY SPENDING RAISES NO ALARM

After all, the government's annual military spending – when you factor in the supplemental bills for warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq – is well above the \$627 billion for Medicare and Medicaid that can cause such alarm in the upper reaches of the nation's media establishment.

Assessing the current presidential race, the Times reported: "The Democrats do not say, in any detail, how they would slow the growth of Medicare and Medicaid or what they think about the main policy options: rationing care, raising taxes, cutting payments to providers or requiring beneficiaries to pay more."

There are other "policy options" – including drastic cuts in the Pentagon budget. And health care for all.

– The author's latest book is *Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State*

# Lettuce Pray For Brains

My daughter went to a local Taco Bell and ordered a taco. She asked the person behind the counter for minimal lettuce.

He said he was sorry, but they only had iceberg.

# Ordaining Women: Excommunication

The Vatican insisted that it is properly following Christian tradition by excluding females from the priesthood as it issued a new warning that women taking part in ordinations will be excommunicated.

The move dashed the hopes both of women seeking to be priests and of Catholics who see that as an option for a church struggling to recruit men.

A top Vatican official said the church acted after what it described as "so-called ordinations" held in various parts of the world.

Monsignor Angelo Amato of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said the Vatican wanted to provide bishops with a clear response on the issue.

## ONLY MALES CAN BE PRIESTS

The church has banned the ordination of women by stating that the priesthood is reserved for males. The new decree is explicit in its reference to women.

"The church does not feel authorized to change the will of its founder Jesus Christ," Amato said in an interview prepared for Vatican Radio that was released to reporters. The reference is to Christ's having chosen only men as his Apostles.

Asked whether the Roman Catholic Church was going "against the tide" in respect to other Christian confessions, Amato said the church was in "good company" with Orthodox and ancient Eastern churches and that it was the Protestants who are breaking with tradition.

## THREE WOMEN EXCOMMUNICATED

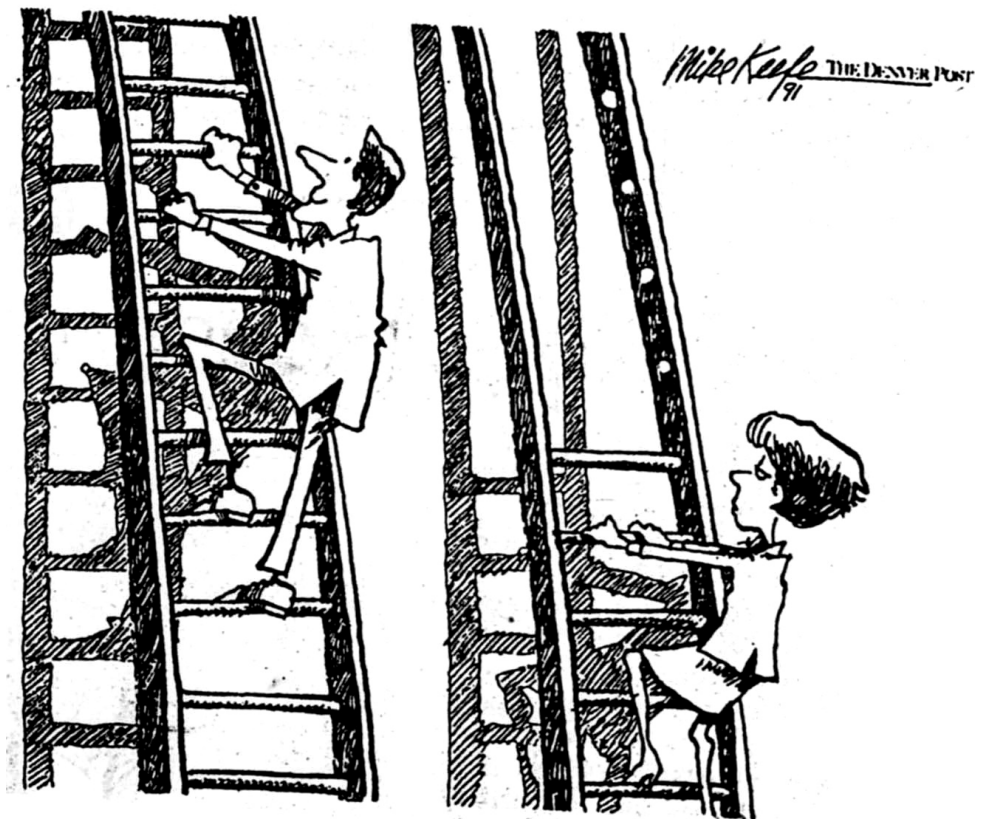
In March, the archbishop of St. Louis excommunicated three women - two Americans and a South African - for participating in a woman's ordination. They were part of the Roman Catholic Women priests movement, which began in 2002.

The decree was published by Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, which in a headline called the ordination of women a "crime."

The congregation said it acted to "preserve the nature and validity of the sacrament" of ordination.

The decree - signed by the congregation's head, American Cardinal William Levada - said anyone trying to ordain a woman and any woman who attempts to receive the ordination would incur automatic excommunication.

Pope Benedict XVI led the doctrinal office before becoming pontiff in 2005.



Like his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, he has consistently rebuffed calls to change traditional church teachings on family planning, divorce, abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage and the requirement that priests be male and celibate.

## DIRE NEED FOR PRIESTS

"We didn't expect anything different now, but in 20 to 30 years they will be expressing their regrets when they will need more priests," said Vittorio Bellavite, an Italian spokesman for the international reform group We Are Church.

The Vatican released figures showing that the number of priests increased slightly worldwide between 2000 and 2006, with the growth in Africa and Asia. It said the number remained stable in the Americas but dropped nearly 6% in Europe.

Catholics who are excommunicated cannot receive the sacraments. Amato said the penalty can be lifted if those so punished are sincerely repentant.

# Abstinence-Only Impact Is Horrifying

By Cecile Richards

For the first time, a congressional committee took on the task of examining the \$1.5 billion failure of government funded abstinence-only programs.

House Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Henry A. Waxman, D-CA, called on public health experts and young people whose lives have been deeply affected by the ineffective programs to urge lawmakers to reconsider the abysmally poor use of taxpayer dollars.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control found that at least one in four teen girls has a sexually transmitted infection [STI], and that the teen birthrate is on the rise for the first time in 16 years - all in the wake of abstinence only.

At this point, the weight of the evidence cannot be ignored, and under the glare of a congressional inquiry policymakers will have to answer tough questions about why we continue to waste millions of dollars a year on a policy that has failed to keep teens healthy and safe.

## YOUNG ADULTS DETAIL THEIR EXPERIENCES

At this hearing, young adults told the congressional panel about their experiences with abstinence-only programs.

Max Siaeel, who now works with the AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth and Families, said that "the abstinence-only message did not prepare me for life, and I contracted HIV from the first person with whom I consented to having unprotected sex. I was still in high school."

In addition, public health expert John Santelli, MD, MPH, testified before the committee about numerous independent studies, including federally funded evaluations, that have concluded that abstinence-only programs do nothing to delay teenage sexual activity and do not adequately prepare young people to make responsible health decisions.

## AMERICA IS FAILING ITS YOUTH

The moving testimony by the young people who shared their personal stories exposes the stark reality that abstinence-only programs are failing our teens.

To date, 17 states have refused to accept federal funds for abstinence-only programs - but not Oklahoma, which has picked up millions since then Gov. Frank Keating imposed abstinence-only.

Planned Parenthood is a leading advocate for school education programs that will keep teens healthy by including information about abstinence as well as about contraception, healthy communication, responsible decision-making, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

## THEY TEACH THE WHOLE TRUTH

Planned Parenthood has the nation's largest network of sex educators, who teach young people in schools and communities nationwide, every day, how to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

In their affiliates' 860 health centers across the country, providers and educators see firsthand the price that young people pay when they are denied access to THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, JUNE 25, 2008, PAGE 18

medically accurate, comprehensive sex education that could help them protect their lives and their futures.

That's why Planned Parenthood submitted a statement for the Congressional Record urging Congress to work with those in the reproductive health community to find common-sense solutions to put an end to this public health crisis.

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# Huge Shift Confronts U.S. Catholic Church

To say she was a practicing Catholic would be an understatement. For years, Maria Aparecida Calazans was a mainstay at her Long Island church, joining dozens of fellow Brazilian immigrants for the Portuguese language Mass on Sunday mornings.

She and her husband, Ramon, were married at the church. Their two daughters were baptized there, and every Friday she attended a prayer meeting that she had helped organize.

But six years ago, her husband went to a relative's baptism at a Pentecostal church in a warehouse in Astoria, Queens, and came home smitten.

The couple made a deal.

"We would go to the Pentecostal service on Thursdays and to Mass on Sundays, and then we would decide which one we felt most comfortable with," Mrs. Calazans said.

Within 40 days, they had given up Roman Catholicism and embraced Pentecostalism, following the path of the estimated 1.3 million Latino Catholics who have joined Pentecostal congregations since immigrating to the United States, according to a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

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## Granny Bashers

# Attacks On Social Security, Medicare

By Dean Baker

A bipartisan group of prominent budget experts held a press event at the ultra-conservative Brookings Institution where they argued that Congress has to make major cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

They claimed large cuts in these programs were necessary in order to prevent the explosion in the budget deficit that is projected if these programs stay on their current course.

While these experts are right to point to the long-term fiscal problems facing the country, the real problem is not the budget and these key programs on which tens of millions of people depend.

The real problem is the United States has a broken health care system, which is projected to get progressively more inefficient through time.

### HEALTH CARE WILL FUEL THE EXPLOSION

Since roughly half of the country's health care costs are paid by the government, primarily through Medicare and Medicaid, the projected explosion in health care costs is also projected to lead to an explosion in government spending.

If the health care system is never fixed, the burden on the budget will eventually be unsustainable, with annual deficits running into the trillions of dollars, exactly as the Brookings contingent claimed.

Our per person health care costs are already more than twice as high as the average in other wealthy countries like Germany, England and Canada.

In the projected scenario, per person health care costs will be four or five times as high in the United States as in other countries by 2050.

### EMPLOYERS FACE HUGE DISADVANTAGE

In this context, U.S. firms will face an enormous competitive disadvantage if they pay for their workers' health care costs.

We lead all nations in per capita spending per citizen, but 37 million Americans are without health insurance.

It is crucial the public recognize that the problem is health care costs, not a growing population of elderly. The two issues are easily confused, especially since most public sector health care costs go to provide health care for the elderly.

The projected increase in the ratio of retirees to workers will impose a strain on the budget, but it will not be qualitatively different than the strain that aging has imposed in prior decades.

The country has always been aging – we are living longer – we can easily cover the cost of a growing population of retirees as long as the economy is healthy.

### IT DEPENDS ON A HEALTHY ECONOMY

With normal productivity and wage growth, our children and grandchildren will be able to support a larger population of retirees and still enjoy a better standard of living than we do.

Most of us now enjoy a better standard of living than our grandparents, even though we support a much larger number of retirees than they did in their working years.



However, if health care costs follow the projected trajectory, then the cost of Medicare, Medicaid, and other government health care programs will be unsustainable.

Of course, in this scenario the rising cost of health care will also place an enormous burden on the private sector.

If the companies don't pay for insurance, then most workers will face an enormous struggle paying for insurance costs that will be almost as high as the typical wage of a worker today.

### WORKERS FACE A DISMAL FUTURE

In either case, workers will have far less money to spend on food, housing, education, and other necessary expenses, if health care costs grow as projected.

No one in the Brookings contingent would dispute the basic facts; we are all looking at the same numbers. If health care costs in the United States were brought in line with costs in other wealthy countries, all of which enjoy longer life expectancies than we do, then we would not be looking at scary budget projections 20 or 30 years down the road.

This suggests the urgency of fixing the U.S. health care system. Health care reform is not only necessary to extend health care coverage to the uninsured, it is also essential for preventing our health care system from strangling the economy.

Reform will require overcoming the opposition of extremely powerful lobbies, such as the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, but there really is no alternative.

As the Brookings contingent said, the current path is unsustainable. And it is not acceptable to tell our parents and grandparents they will just have to die because our health care system has made their care unaffordable.

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## COUNTERFEIT

From Page One

translated into jumping in bed with George Bush. Most are contrite.

Be careful in speaking freely because the Patriot Act enables federal thugs to arrest and hold critics without trial. Rendition and torture are standard fare for alleged terrorists held without any legal recourse.

Even some of the nation's federal prosecutors know the grief of reprisal from the likes of Karl Rove and Alberto Gonzales.

We still enjoy religious freedom but there are those, including Bush, who would transform America into a fundamentalist theocracy. To quote Thomas Jefferson: "Church and State are a loathsome combination."

When we celebrate Independence Day, let's not forget the jeopardy in which our nation's founders placed themselves. Or the jeopardy this nation faces today.

Let's express our thanks to God that He has enabled us to maintain the freedoms purchased for us at so great a cost, but are so easily lost.

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