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Auditor's Political Education McMahan Besieged

By Arnold Hamilton

In his first 4½ years as state auditor, Democrat Jeff McMahan mostly garnered headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Few seem to recall the more than \$200 million in fraud, waste and abuse his office uncovered. Or the embezzled \$110,000 returned to Wanette's public schools. Or the creation of a nationally acclaimed Performance Audit Division that identified more than \$20 million in potential savings in the state's motor vehicle fleet.

Instead, McMahan's name too often surfaced in a murky world of straw donors, gulf coast junkets, guided fishing trips, failed business ventures and federal investigations.

"It's a sad deal," he says, "but you've got to put your faith in the voters ... I know that most of them just read the headlines, and it puts doubt. But those that know me know better."

McMahan's woes can be traced to at least three factors:

- He had never run for public office when he entered the 2002 statewide race for auditor and inspector, hoping to replace his friend and mentor Clifton Scott, who was retiring.

The question: Did political naivete lead to questionable ethics decisions, including junkets with an abstractor, Steve Phipps, whose business was regulated by the auditor's office?

- He drew a tenacious Republican opponent in Gary Jones who still works around-the-clock to help focus media attention on McMahan's mistakes and routinely demands that McMahan be prosecuted.

- He didn't choose his political associates well. Phipps turned out to be an estranged business partner of former state Sen. Gene Stipe. Both are accused of illegally funneling campaign contributions through straw donors.

Any hint of nefarious, Godfather-like string-pulling by Stipe is enough to send the state's mainstream journalism pack – especially the Oklahoman – into a feeding frenzy.

Phipps recently pleaded guilty to a federal mail fraud count in an investigation of a kickback scheme involving state lawmakers. And Stipe returns to federal court next month, accused of violating the terms of his federal pro-

bation by associating with a convicted felon and participating in the straw donor scheme to elect Democrats.

The concern for McMahan and his supporters is that Phipps and others could say anything – or implicate anyone – if they think it will help lessen their punishments.

For his part, McMahan concedes he made mistakes, but he denies doing anything illegal. He believes Jones, now the state GOP chairman, and his hard-right legislative allies are orchestrating a campaign to discredit him so they ultimately can win control of the auditor's office.

"I'm not a politician, I'm an auditor," McMahan says. "I like to think of myself as a good person. I don't have a whole lot, but I do have a reputation, and he [Jones] has attacked that, so yeah, it p----- me off."

Jones admits his campaign against McMahan became "personal a long time ago." But he insists, "The reason I have pursued this doesn't change the facts. Crimes have been committed."

Other Republicans aren't so certain. In the last session, state Rep. David

Dank, R-OKC, introduced a resolution demanding McMahan step aside, but it went nowhere – even though the GOP dominates the state House.

Even so, Jones says he's convinced Stipe and Co. tried to "buy" the auditor to help their abstracting businesses.

And the junkets with Phipps? "That's just accepting a bribe," says Jones.

Veteran political strategist Pat Hall, who directed McMahan's two winning campaigns, said Jones is "constantly searching for new reporters and new media to sell his conspiracy theories."

"You have to wonder if this is about the Republican Party or if this is about Gary Jones' revenge. I happen to think it's about Gary Jones' revenge."

McMahan says he's most incensed by allegations he strong-armed his staff for campaign contributions.

"Never happened," he says, adding his employees are "upset with me because I don't let them know when I'm having a campaign event."

He also says Phipps "never asked me for anything. Never. And he never

got anything."

In fact, McMahan says, he never had any abstractor ask for anything.

[Abstractors soon will be regulated by their own board, not the auditor's office.]

McMahan calls participating in a fishing trip with Phipps a "bonehead" decision.

"It's just part of being new. No excuses. It was just stupid. It was a bad decision. Never happen again. I'll accept whatever punishment I've got coming. I did not know he paid for it at the time."

McMahan says retired auditor Scott introduced him to Phipps in 2002: "He seemed like a very intelligent man. Never thought he would be doing anything that would be contrary to state law."

Scott says he never questioned McMahan's integrity and wouldn't now: "His being a novice in the political arena shows. He's made some mistakes, but I don't think it'll sink him."

The straw donor allegations also haunt McMahan. U.S. Rep. Dan Boren and Gov. Brad Henry quelled the furor by donating more than \$70,000 to charities from their leftover election funds – amounts equal to the campaign contributions they received from straw donors tied to Stipe.

McMahan says his campaign fund is nearly empty, so he didn't have \$35,000 available for such a gesture. But he also says he can't help but wonder what he as a candidate can really do about straw donors?

With hundreds, sometimes thousands of contributors – all signing statements that the money they are giving is their own – candidates are dependent "on the truthfulness of those giving the contribution."

"My first impression was, if I had the money, I could just pay it to charity and it'd all go away," he says. "But after thinking about it, there was one individual [Jones] that was not going to let this go away."

"He has accused me of many, many things, which are all false. And I guess he believes that the more mud he throws, maybe something will stick."

Editor's Note: For more from our interview with Jeff McMahan, go to www.okobserver.net.



Observations

Democrats?

If you read our Editor Arnold Hamilton's interview [June 25 issue] with new Democratic Party Chairman Ivan Holmes, you know the party is at a critical crossroads.

Yes, there are still solid Democrats in Oklahoma, but when it comes to supporting the party with their money, too many pull a disappearing act.

Outgoing Chair Lisa Pryor paid off all but \$54,000 of the \$500,000 in red ink she inherited, due in large part to funds advanced to Rep. Brad Carson for his unsuccessful race for the U.S. Senate.

Carson didn't stick around the party long enough to help pay off the debt.

With the exception of ex-Gov. David Walters, big names in the party have done little or nothing to aid the party. Some will help national candidates while doing nothing for state candidates.

Holmes is seeking 1,000 Democrats willing to pledge \$25 a month to support ongoing party operations. Any amount would be greatly appreciated.

Democrats should know that Oklahoma Republicans are on the rise mainly because they raise funds necessary to back candidates and operate party phone banks.

Final note to Democrats: It's your party to lose and you are losing it.

No Vacation

Summer has arrived, but many Americans are not thinking about vacation plans. Unfortunately, only one in four Americans receives paid vacation or holiday time.

Even worse, nearly half of all full-time private sector workers in the U.S. are not paid for sick days, with low-income workers, parents, and those with chronic illnesses hit the hardest.

Businesses also suffer in productivity and other workers face health risks when sick employees are forced to go to work. The American public overwhelmingly agrees that all workers deserve days off from work.

A whopping 95% of workers believe

it is "unacceptable" for employers to deny sick days. Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-MA, and Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-CT, have introduced the Healthy Families Act [HFA], which would guarantee that workers receive at least seven paid sick days each year.

America is the only advanced economy in the world that does not guarantee its workers paid vacation, according to a new study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Many bosses ask why employee morale is so low. Check the mirror.

True Drew

Looking for a case of true grit? Look no further than Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson's long fight to protect the Illinois River watershed.

Thanks to a new federal court ruling, Oklahoma authorities won't have to pinpoint where Arkansas companies are polluting the watershed with poultry litter.

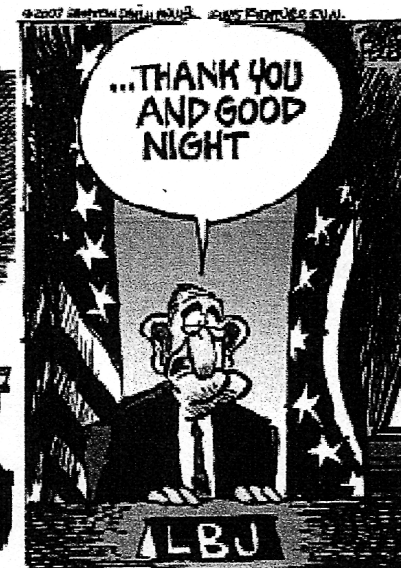
Litterer-In-Chief Tyson Foods Inc. brought the lawsuit, falsely claiming Edmondson's suit should be dismissed against the sued companies because the suit lacked specifics about where within the watershed environmental damage was caused by poultry litter.

Trevor Hammons, Oklahoma assistant attorney general, said the eight companies sued by Edmondson have been told exactly where poultry litter is causing harm – the entire watershed.

The lawsuit was filed by Drew Edmondson two years ago, accusing poultry companies with operations in Arkansas of polluting the 1,600-square-mile Illinois River watershed with poultry litter.

Given enough time, the pollution could destroy the 99-mile long river watershed.

The polluters have done everything in their power to defame Edmondson. A lesser man would have thrown in the towel. Edmondson is not a lesser man. Bravo!



Okies Speak

Oklahoma's prison system will grow by 900 inmates at a cost of \$16 million in the next fiscal year beginning July 1 thanks to a do-nothing Legislature and a governor scared to death to sign paroles.

According to a report released by the Criminal Justice Resource Center, by 2016 Oklahoma can expect more than 28,870 inmates in its prison system, an increase of 18.4% compared with fiscal year 2006.

The largest cause of the prison growth today doesn't have to do with the intake in prisons, it has to do with fewer releases from prisons.

Sen. Richard Lerblance, D-Hartshorne, who heads the Oklahoma Sentencing Commission, told the Legislature it was time to start listening to some of the commission's recommendations.

Among the commission's proposals [ignored by the Republican-dominated Legislature and the governor] is changing the Constitution to remove the governor from the parole process. It didn't get out of committee.

In fiscal year 2006, about 19% of all eligible inmates were granted parole, according to the report. In fiscal year 2003, just more than 31% of eligible inmates were granted parole.

The number of inmates granted parole or having their sentences commuted by Gov. Brad Henry fell to 846 last fiscal year, a 71% drop compared with 2001, costing taxpayers millions.

The report also shows that inmates continue to leave prison after completing their sentences, rather than being released on supervised parole.

Wouldn't you know it? A statewide poll shows a majority of Okies do not want anyone released early – even the non-violent or dozens of non-violent illegal immigrants who could be returned to Mexico.

Go figure.

Deadly China

How many Americans know that some of those cheap Chinese products are filthy, even potentially dangerous?

Thanks to the Bush Administration only a tenth of 1% of food coming from China is tested. More than 25% of the food tested was bacteria-laden or filthy.

Now we learn that every one of the 24 kinds of Communist China-made toys were recalled for safety reasons in the United States so far this year.

The latest recall involves 1.5 million Thomas & Friends trains and rail components. The toys were coated at the factory in China with lead paint, which damages brain cells, especially in children.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has doubled the number of recalls in the last five years, driving the total number to a record 467 last year. Yet the agency continues to be under-funded.

The American Toy Industry Association – big boosters of Bush trade policies – declined to comment.

Trade with China is so important to the Administration they are willing to endanger millions of Americans – even children.

Bush Support?

The Congress passed a comprehensive \$646 billion defense spending bill by an overwhelming bipartisan vote.

The bill authorizes more than \$100 billion in military procurement. That includes money to buy new protective vehicles and body armor for troops, and an additional \$142 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

President Bush has threatened to veto the bill because he objects to, among other things, a recommended 3.5% military pay raise for 2008, with further increases in 2009 through 2012.

The increases are intended to reduce the gap between military and civilian pay that stands at about 3.9% today. Even after the proposed increases, a gap will still remain.

Bush also objected to a measly \$40 monthly allowance for military survivors, additional benefits for surviving family members of civilian employees, and price controls for prescription drugs under Tricare, the health care plan for military personnel and their dependents.

Bush's veto threat is holding captive all the funding contained in the bill.

The proposed cuts angered military families and veterans' groups and even received an editorial attack in the Army Times.

The editorial noted that "Bush's tax cuts have left little elbow room" in the federal budget "and the squeeze is on across the board."

Congress ultimately approved the pay increase and other help for veterans and their families.

Bush backed down, typical of a man who talks out of both sides of his mouth. Does he support the troops? Hardly. He prefers war.

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

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

- Adapted by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Don't forget – there is no July 25 issue. We will see you again Aug. 10 with commentary and independent news insight found in no other Oklahoma publication.

Dart: To OU President David Boren, for volunteering to work in the campaign of Independent Michael Bloomberg for President. Someone tell him to shut up – he's a public employee. Ethics Commission, are you listening?

Oklahoma is one of six states whose legislatures defied a federal law requiring new driver's licenses standards. Oklahoma's Legislature claimed it would amount to a national ID card.

Laurel: To those getting the word out that you should never turn your cell phone completely off. Believe it or not, it emits a ping that enables authorities to trace its whereabouts.

Apparently no Democrat wants to take on Republican U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe – not Attorney General Drew Edmondson, Rep. Dan Boren or Gov. Brad Henry. Tentatively looking at it is freshman state Sen. Andrew Rice of OKC.

Dart: To hypocrite-in-chief G.W. Bush, rewarding Dick Cheney's fall guy, Scooter Libby, with a commutation. You out an undercover CIA agent and serve less time than Paris Hilton, Martha Stewart and Susan MacDougal?

Reader Jim Lazalier of Norman tells us that when Molly Ivins left half her estate to the ACLU, she remarked: "I can't think of anything I'd rather do with my worldly goods than fund folks who will be a pain in the ass to whatever powers that come to be."

Brace yourself for another initiative petition, this one designed to let voters decide whether wine and strong beer could be sold in grocery stores. The sponsor is Oklahomans for Modern Laws.

Dart: To Firestone Tires which closed its tire plant in Oklahoma City but still runs its rubber plant in Harbel, Liberia. Small children, living in ramshackle barracks, work 12 hour days tapping those trees. Why buy their tires?

Hillary Clinton breezed through OKC, avoided the media, and left with \$282,000, thanks to a fundraiser held by Attorney Mike Turpin. It drove the Disappointment editorial page crazy!

Laurel: To Chesapeake Energy Co., for a legal suit against the Oklahoma Corporation Commission to delay approved plans for a \$1.8 billion coal-fired plant – the last thing Oklahoma's environment needs.

Among 121 countries, America is the world's 96th least peaceful country. Most violent is Iraq. Most peaceful are Norway, New Zealand, Denmark and Ireland. [Global Peace Index]

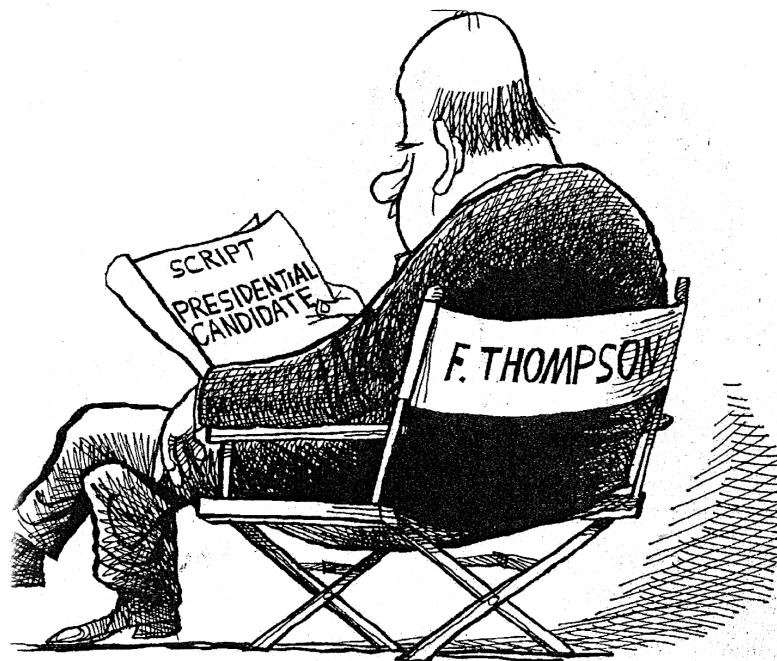
Dart: To the U.S. Justice Department, deliberately sidetracking civil rights cases under the Bush regime. Their emphasis has been on religion-based issues. [New York Times investigative reporting]

More than 87% of Americans over 45 do some form of volunteering, averaging 15 hours per month. [AARP]

Laurel: To the state government transparency law taking effect this fall. If done right, the state web site will allow Oklahomans to see what a mess Republicans have made of the state budget – millions in unpaid bills.

An anti-Alzheimer's drug developed by the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation has gone into clinical trials. Thanks go to the Foundation's Jordan Tang. Keep your fingers crossed.

Dart: To Republican State House Communications Director Damon Gardenhire who is now quoting himself in press releases. He needs to find something to do.



The carpetbaggers are back. The so-called Yes On Term Limits Inc. want to circulate an initiative petition to put term limits on statewide elected officials. They have filed a federal lawsuit. Here's hoping they lose.

Laurel: To OKC Attorneys Burns Hargis and Mike Turpin for their voluntary work in raising vitally needed money for Legal Aid, only recourse for the poor.

It's a miracle! State Supreme Court members can walk upright without spines! Thanks to their Adequacy opinion, no student can be guaranteed a textbook if the Legislature so decrees – and many don't have books.

Dart: To the state's official buffoon, GOP U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, subject of a skit by TV's Jon Stewart on the Daily Show about his statement that global warming is a hoax. TV weatherman Gary England was a co-star.

Actor Denzel Washington was visiting Brooks Army Medical Center in San Antonio where evacuated soldiers are treated, especially burn victims. Told they were running out of space, he whipped out his checkbook on the spot and donated enough to cover an entire new building.

Laurel: To ex-state Rep. Debbie Blackburn, seeking the Democratic nomination for Oklahoma County commissioner. She would be dynamite.

Our state Superintendent Sandy Garrett wants the six-hour school day extended to seven hours. Due to professional days, Oklahoma's 180-day school year is really 175 days.

Dart: To ABC-TV, rejecting a condom ad despite the fact that it is the No. 1 way to prevent unwanted pregnancies and certain venereal disease. Yet ABC permits salacious network shows.

If you are represented by a state senator or representative who is a member of the Birchite American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC] don't vote for them again – Republican or Democrat. ALEC is anti-union, anti-public education.

Laurel: To the Tulsa World's Washington correspondent, Jim Myers, for reporting the fact that anti-pork barrel U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn took the most lobby-paid trips last year.

Public school teachers should beware of the possible presidential candidacy of far right actor Fred Thompson, bitter enemy of teachers unions.

Dart: To many of America's greedy corporations, cutting paid sick days from an average of 40 days to three days. Half of all workers have zero sick days. Average vacation time is now nine days.

Our rage at the Bush Administration knows no bounds. Not only were veterans mistreated at Walter Reed, it turns out that more than 4,500 personal letters to veterans were found undelivered. The mail clerk was fired.

Laurel: To Ralph Nader for his investigative report showing health care today is costing every American \$1,900 a year, with more than \$200 billion in waste and fraud in the 50% paid by the federal government.

Shhh! Don't tell the morons on the Oklahoman editorial page, but hundreds of large law firms do free work for women. It's LAWYERS [Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equality, Rights and Social Justice].

Dart: To the Bush Administration for clobbering America's National Guard. Oklahoma is one of 31 states with less than authorized equipment. Bush could screw up a two-car funeral.

To hell with the state Corrections Department, Mental Health, Public Health and community colleges, but the '07 Legislature found the Senate a \$638,000 budget boost. When will Democrats dump inept Senate Co-Leader Mike Morgan?

Laurel: To The Oklahoman's Carla Hinton, the only way Oklahomans would have found out that the Southern Baptist Convention questions global warming and opposes any further emission regulations.

The belle of the ball at the State Chamber annual meeting was Sen. Susan Paddock, D-Ada. She supported a corrupt tort reform bill [and medical malpractice limits] despite the fact that her husband is a physician.

One of America's best investigative reporters, James Ridgeway, has a fascinating article in the August issue of Mother Jones, *In Search Of John Doe No. 2*, in the federal building bombing.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I dropped by the Reproductive Services here in Tulsa to check out the two billboards on the property across the street now owned by the Catholic Church. They are large pieces of plastic stuck up between two poles. One says something like "There is Another Choice" and the other says "Considering Abortion?"

However, the bottom of each sign was ripped away where the number for the Catholic anti-abortion counseling service appeared. Apparently someone is very upset about these signs being there.

I found it ironic and hypocritical that the Catholic Church spent thousands of dollars on a vacant lot full of weeds just to plant propaganda designed to make women feel bad about their decision to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, yet Bishop Slatery said in the Tulsa World recently that all of the services provided by Catholic Charities were free except one - adoption! Chalk up 1 for field of weeds, 0 for field of dreams!

Barbara Santee
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Cool George Washington said keep your nose out of other countries' business.

In elementary, secondary, undergraduate and graduate school, my teachers taught me that the Middle East was a bees' nest of angry, violent people as regards one another. David Halberstam said we had slammed against a giant beehive.

We need to say grace and leave this place.

Al Engel
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Official Washington is leaking like a rotten garden hose. Hackers have broken into almost all the very secret e-mail systems to include DISA and the CIA - allegedly "totally secure" systems.

We know someone broke into the DOD systems and downloaded all kinds of highly embarrassing data, such as the real casualty lists, the ruination of most equipment and its non-replacement, military desertions and suicides and so on.

Of course, the Bush people deliberately deleted all of their sinister e-mails at the order of Rove, some time ago, but some hacker, or hackers, broke into the RNC and other systems and downloaded tens of thousands of highly compromising e-mails.

Will these ever surface? Will anyone care? There is a growing grassroots movement to oust Bush and Cheney from the White House but George is too busy listening to God talking to him to pay much attention. Cheney thinks he is God and no one dares to tell him different.

D.R. Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

This president lectures us on ethics as he vetoes stem cell research?

This president who launched a war of choice against a nation of no threat to us? Who thereby is responsible for the loss of over 3,500 service men and women and 25,000 more casualties? Of at least 66,000 Iraqi civilian deaths? Of creating a horde of 2 million out-of-country refugees and 2 million in-country displaced persons? Of endorsing torture? Of doing away with habeas corpus? This president lectures us on ethics and the sanctity of life?

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Concerning Ralph Jackson's comments in the June 25 issue, I offer the following, hopefully constructive, suggestion: Political partisanship when tempered with thoughtful questioning can be a positive force. However, blind allegiance to wrongful party dogma as promulgated by certain "blue-dog" Democrats is destructive to progressive ideals.

Witness the blind march of Republicans in cadence with the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld-O'Reilly-Limbaugh drumbeat. The blue-dog Democrat Zell Miller address the last Republican National Convention, saying, "...There is but one man to whom I am willing to entrust their future, and that man's name is George W. Bush."

The destructive Bush agenda has been and continues to be enabled by certain Democrats. Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District is represented by such a blue-dog. Dan Boren supports and enables the right-wing agenda.

As an independent-minded Democrat, I intend to work hard to defeat any and all reactionary politicians. Better to have a Republican wolf at the door than a Democratic snake in the house.

John Brown
Choteau

Editor's Note: Jackson's letter is reprinted on page 8, along with a response from writer Karen Webb.



Editor, The Observer:

The world is a dangerous place. Governments are hateful and jealous and greedy for power and riches. In our hubris we imagine we know the best government for other nations. As an individual, I sympathize and empathize with those less fortunate [from my point of view]. My government, however, is not charged with changing the government of others so that I might feel righteous. My government is charged with protecting me from imminent danger from other governments.

The United States is under no mandate, political or moral, to interfere with any other government. Our government's obligation is to prevent imminent attack, destroy those who attack us, and come home when the danger has been eliminated.

At the present time, no other government presents a specific military danger to us. Many governments attack us politically as they try to annex more nations under their power but they will not attack us militarily. Our military and defense systems are too strong. We could be damaged but the aggressors would be destroyed. I have no problems with a first strike in the face of imminent danger. However, it is in our best interests to assist other nations in resisting aggressive attempts by providing political and financial assistance. Send guns, bullets and bread, but not troops for combat.

We have nothing to gain by remaining in Iraq. It has been said that to announce a timetable for withdrawal would only inform Al Qaeda how long they have to wait before we are gone. This is a specious argument. They have always known we will withdraw. They are patient and it doesn't matter when we leave. Our presence and insistence on imposing our government have already resulted in a brutal and bloody civil war. The savage hatred of Sunni for Shi'ite will remain after we are gone and, perhaps, a civil war was inevitable. In the meantime, Al Qaeda will plan and train and undermine and infiltrate and recruit while we are preoccupied with an internecine slaughter. Our continued presence in Iraq only insures a platform from which we may be attacked by Al Qaeda. Not Iraq, not Iran, not Pakistan, not Korea, not even Russia.

We spend billions of dollars to finance a no-win situation of our own making. At best, this situation does nothing to improve our nation or the world. At worst, how must we place a value on the life of one of our soldiers? All of this treasure would be better spent on establishing a more

effective Homeland Security.

In the words of Charlie Brown [or somebody], "Speak softly but carry the biggest bat," [or something].

G.A. Cooper
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I was surprised that at the Democratic Presidential debate, none of the candidates could give an appropriate answer to a question. For example: How are you going to finance universal health care? A more appropriate answer would have been: "I'll finance it the same way George Bush is financing his about to be \$800 billion war."

Jim Stodola
Corinth, TX

Editor, The Observer:

Need I repeatedly point out the "500-pound gorilla" sitting in the corner?

Forty-three thousand Americans are killed each and every year in automobiles on public roads. Hundreds of thousands are injured and permanently maimed. This is "not a problem," apparently, as far as the government "safety people" are concerned.

Those who are most vulnerable are the very young and the very old. Automobile accidents change the lives of the elderly, often irreversibly - but in most of our cities, they have no choice in the matter but to stay home.

We need to talk about this absurd "blind spot" in American life.

Remember that the Japanese and French bullet train systems have never - never - produced a single passenger fatality in normal operations. These advanced rail systems are fast, convenient, clean, people friendly and the most energy efficient transport ever devised by man. But they don't operate in the United States, a testament to the utter corruption and subversion of our governments by automobile and highway interests and all their hangers-on.

Tom Elmore
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I have been a loyal follower and reader for more years than I can remember. I felt compelled to write to you today because your front page article in the June 25, 2007 edition was probably one of, if not the best you have ever written, and you have written many, many good articles.

You are one of a very few Oklahomans who get it right.

God bless you and keep you going strong.

Kathy Roberts
Oklahoma City

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Hurry! Frosty's calendar fills fast.

Frosty's Notebook

What Fairness?

Was it your misfortune to dial in on Oklahoma City's CBS affiliate's slanted report on the Fairness Doctrine?

For you with no gray in your hair, the Fairness Doctrine was a fixture in American broadcasting until the Reagan Administration.

Radio and TV airwaves are owned by the American people. One of the givens was that anyone personally attacked on radio or TV could reply via the same airwaves.

A huge money-backed campaign was launched by radio and TV network operators to eliminate the Fairness Doctrine. Never underestimate the power of money or the sorry politics of Ronald Reagan – it was repealed.

KWTV's Channel 9 interviewed rightwingers using the airwaves to defend the lack of fairness – including some of Oklahoma's worst. They claim it is market-driven. How specious is that argument when all they hire are rightwing nuts.

The massive operation of radio and TV networks are owned by conservative Republican corporations and that's who they feature – blithering rightwing loons such as Glenn Beck.

Conservative Sen. Trent Lott, R-MS, raised a furor when he called out the rightwing radio hosts working to defeat comprehensive immigration reform.

"Talk radio is running America," Lott said. "We have to deal with that problem" – rightwing talk show hosts, from lunatic Rush Limbaugh to sexual harasser Bill O'Reilly, who invent "facts."

This generally malicious propaganda reaches an estimated 50 million listeners each week on more than 1,700 stations across the nation.

Nobody is allowed to reply, no matter how abusive the language used against them. When they attempt to reply they are often cut off.

No wonder that so many Americans are misinformed on the issues, from stem cell research to medical care, from the Bush Administration incompetence and criminality to the K Street gang of lobbyists who own Washington.

In the spring of 2007, 91% of the political talk radio brainwashing programming on the stations owned by the top five commercial station owners was conservative, and only 9% was moderate or progressive.

Ninety-two percent of these stations [236 stations out of 257] do not broadcast a single minute of moderate or progressive talk radio programming.

In the Top 10 radio markets in the country, 76% of the news-talk programming is conservative, while 24% is moderate or progressive.

In four of those Top 10 markets – Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, Houston – the domination of conservative talk radio is between 96% and 100%.



The increasing imbalance in talk radio has paralleled significant shifts in the media ownership landscape. Since the Telecommunications Act of 1996, there has been a dramatic decline [34%] in the number of radio station owners, meaning a sharp increase in media ownership concentration.

This trend has occurred because a Republican Congress eliminated restrictions on the total ownership of radio stations by any one media entity.

Now, in the largest markets with 45 or more commercial radio stations, one entity may own or control up to eight commercial radio stations. That's what Clear Channel did in Oklahoma with such slanted stations as KTOK-AM, once a mighty broadcast power but today pure drivel.

Little wonder that fewer than half of registered Americans bother going to the polls. They have been convinced that liberals have destroyed the American government. Actually, it was fundamentalist conservatives being used as puppets by greedy corporations.

Teachers Are Over-Paid?

Kappan Magazine's education expert Gerald Bracey has unhorsed another education myth. He put a study [the Greene-Winters Report] on his blog site concerning allegations of big salaries for teachers.

Naturally the full-time local public school basher, the Council of Public Affairs, cheered the report. [They also push vouchers and unregulated homeschooling.]

The most common topic in the responses on his blog concerned the hours that teachers put in without pay. As one contributor put it, "Yes, I got so rich as a teacher I am still driving a 20-year-old car with 500,000 miles on it. I quit to become a prison guard. Why? The hours are shorter, the pay is higher, and I never, ever take any work home."

With tongue-in-cheek Bracey wrote: "I observed in my blog that high salaries must be why so many recent college grads are lining up for classroom appointments and why half of them leave within five years – they just can't cope with the good life that teaching affords."

Teacher Mobility and Attrition, a periodic survey from the National Center for Education Statistics, gives a more precise picture of how many teachers leave the profession and why.

Of the more than three million public school teachers in the U.S., 8.1% or 261,100, were labeled movers – that is, they taught in a different school in 2004-

05 than in 2003-04. Leavers – those who left the profession after 2003-04 – constituted 8.4% of the total, numbering 269,600.

Both figures are the highest since the survey began in 1988-89. The percentage of leavers was lowest [5.1%] in 1991-92; the percentage of movers was lowest [7.2%] in 1994-95.

For the first time since the survey began, the number of leavers exceeded the number of movers in 2004-05.

Although there are no data to directly link the increasing number of leavers to No Child Left Behind, something has been driving more teachers to leave the profession.

In addition, the number of private school leavers [13.6%] was at a record, too, but that figure has gone up and down over the years and has always been much higher than the percentage of public school leavers.

Teachers with three years of experience or less and teachers with 20 or more years of experience were most likely to leave [8.1% and 11.2%, respectively].

Teachers who were 30 or younger and those who were 50 or older were most likely to leave [9% and 11.8%, respectively]. Teachers who made less than \$30,000 and those who made \$40,000 or more were most likely to leave [10.6% and 8.7%, respectively].

Coal Is A Step Backward

Let's hope Chesapeake & Co. prevail in the Corporation Commission against what would be the first of several coal-fired energy plants in Oklahoma.

It coincides with the Bush Administration busily undermining hopes for a G-8 climate deal in Germany. Meanwhile the coal industry was hard at work selling a dirty idea on Capitol Hill.

It has to do with new energy legislation in Congress that could include liquid coal, which is about as energy efficient and practical as it sounds. Think of it as turning a hybrid into a Hummer.

Congress needs to know that liquid coal is not the answer. Tell your representative today that what we need are real solutions to global warming like more efficient cars and clean, renewable energy, not legislation driven by special interests like the coal industry.

There's a piece of legislation – the "Coal Liquids Fuel Act" [H.R. 2208] – that, thanks to the powerful coal industry, is gaining popularity in Washington.

If passed into law, this act would be a huge victory for one of the biggest polluters around and would subsidize a dangerous new fuel industry that would actually increase greenhouse gas emissions. It's a step backwards for the envi-

ronment, not a step forward.

Liquid coal is produced when coal is converted into transportation fuels. This process is so inefficient and requires so much energy that it produces almost double the global warming emissions as regular gasoline.

In fact, one ton of coal yields just two barrels of fuel. Not to mention the implications that the increase in water use and coal mining would have on the environment.

We've reached a turning point in history and global warming is not a political game to be played in the back rooms of Congress. It's time to look past corporate interests and do the right thing in Oklahoma and Congress – for the nation and the planet.

**God Favors No Group.
Only religions do that.**

Term Limits Hamper Oklahoma's Progress

By Edwin E. Vineyard

The state has been fortunate to progress as favorably as it has when the voters constantly put amateurs in charge of affairs. But Oklahoma is now suffering the disturbing consequences of having ideologue amateurs in positions of dominant leadership within our government, particularly in the Legislature.

Youth is not a permanent handicap in a legislator, but youth and/or inexperience plus a mind pre-set on most issues can definitely deter quality in government.

The voters in Oklahoma made a big mistake a decade or so ago when they allowed political outsiders to convince them that adopting term limits would improve the quality of legislative functioning.

While the old-timers may have frustrated some by thwarting change, or in other cases slowing the speed of change, they had acquired experience, knowledge, negotiating skills, and a memory for past traditions that kept the Legislature on track and away from foolish mistakes.

DEMAGOGUES RISE TO THE TOP

There are many bright young [or new] legislators of both parties who may be properly viewed as up-and-coming students of government. They do not stay around long enough to become experienced leaders.

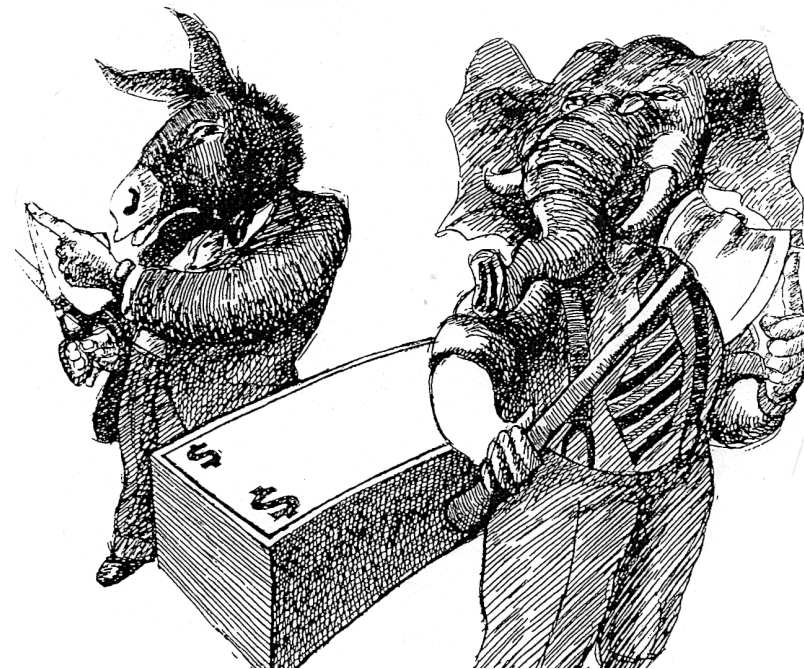
Instead, it appears that the most self-impressed demagogues have consistently emerged as the new majority party leaders. Their lack of experience, when combined with their fanaticism for party dogma, becomes a detriment to Oklahoma's public services.

The situation at the State Medical Examiner's office is a case in point. Almost every intelligent reading and viewing adult in Oklahoma has heard several times about problems at the coroner's office.

Where have the legislators been? Where were they when hearings were held on that budget?

A PREOCCUPATION WITH PARTISANSHIP

Preoccupation with the party agenda – i.e. cutting taxes, making abortion difficult, tort claims, reducing consumer and worker access to courts, and promoting business – has led the majority party legislators to neglect the declining state infrastructure, penal law reform, mental health, education, and other vital



state services.

Aversion to assessing road user taxes to pay for roads and bridges, and the failure to set taxes to pay for college and other public buildings has created vast fiscal problems.

The state has been building up legally questionable bonded debt to pay for highways, college buildings, and other state improvements.

State government has loaded future operating budgets with debt payments for current capital expenses.

LOOK WHOSE NEST IS FEATHERED

College students who must pay tuition are paying higher and higher rates, while the Legislature has given it away free to others with no new tax levied to pay for it.

Average citizens continue to pay state and local taxes, while millions in tax incentives are given away to business corporations.

It is imperative that state government officials, both legislative and executive, become better stewards of government. Public services cost money, and the public and businesses must be taxed to pay for those services.

The state Constitution prescribes the procedure for incurring debt, and that includes a special tax levy to amortize it – just like house payments. Follow the Constitution!

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

Subsidies Hurt Sooner Farmers, World's Poor

By Jim French

What do the African nations of Mali, Chad, Benin, and Burkina Faso share with Jackson, Tillman, and Cimarron counties in Oklahoma? They all have experienced the unintended consequences stemming from U.S. farm policy.

The U.S. Farm Bill is reauthorized approximately every five years. This omnibus legislation determines the policies which govern food and nutrition, commodity, conservation, and rural development programs.

These policies affect all Americans, because we all eat, and rely on our natural resources to provide clean water and air, healthy food, and recreation. But some parts of the Farm Bill, such as commodity programs, have specific impacts on rural Oklahoma, and rural West Africa.

U.S. farmers that grow a narrow range of crops – predominantly cotton, corn, rice, soybeans, and wheat – are eligible for commodity payments. These subsidies are intended to create a safety net so that American farms can weather the ups and downs of the market.

HOW FARM SUBSIDIES WORK – AND DON'T WORK

When the price at the elevator is less than the cost of production, our farmers receive money from the taxpayer to ensure that expenses are covered and, sometimes, profits enhanced.

In the case of some subsidies, checks are cut in relation to the actual bushels produced and the amount of acres farmed – the more bushels and acres, the higher the check.

That means that even in a falling market, the only incentive is to produce more and expand when possible. Expansion, of course, means fewer farms, less people and less business for rural communities.

A Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank study in March of 2005 summarized the overall impact of crop subsidies on rural America as follows:

“Farm payments are not providing a strong boost to the rural economy in those counties that most depend on them. Job gains are weak and population growth is actually negative in most of the counties where farm payments are the biggest share of income.”

DECLINING POPULATION AND HIGHER-THAN-AVERAGE POVERTY

That is certainly the case for the majority of agricultural counties in western Oklahoma. For example, according to the Environmental Working Group subsidy database, Jackson and Tillman counties received some of the highest amounts of crop subsidies from 2003 to 2005.

At the same time U.S. Census Bureau shows that these same counties lost over 8% of their population since the 2000 census. Both also have poverty levels over 14% which is approximately 3% higher than the state average.

When one looks at the counties with the highest population losses – Harmon, Roger Mills, and Cimarron, the same trend holds true. They are all in far western Oklahoma, all are dependent upon farm subsidies, and all have higher than average poverty rates.

French To Speak In OKC On July 10

The Just Faith group at Oklahoma City's Our Lady of Perpetual Help will host a discussion on the 2007 Farm Bill with Kansas farmer and rancher Jim French on July 10. The 7 p.m. meeting will be held in the church's Connor Center at 3214 Lake Avenue. The session will focus on ways the new farm legislation can modify the commodity payment program to strengthen rural America and give small-scale farmers at home and abroad a chance to compete in world markets, as well as to protect and expand spending for the nutrition and food stamp programs that feed the nation's hungry. For more information, call 405.525.2349 Ext. 110.

And what does this have to do with Africa?

OVER-PRODUCTION HURTS POOR COUNTRIES, TOO

When U.S. producers are encouraged to overproduce a crop like cotton and sell it at a price sometimes less than half the cost of production, farmers in the world's poorest countries suffer.

Farmers in Mali or Chad do not receive subsidies, growing their crops without machinery or irrigation. Most struggle to survive on just a dollar a day. And they find themselves attempting to compete with cheap crops subsidized by Uncle Sam.

The end result there is pretty much as it is in the United States: rural people are displaced, migrating to cities where jobs may or may not exist. Poverty rates rise and hunger increases.

And instead of Africans having the ability to stay working at livelihoods that help them feed themselves, invest in water wells, schools, and clinics, they often have to become dependent upon aid donated by other nations.

NEW FARM BILL CAN FIX THE PROBLEMS

Reforming the 2007 farm bill can do much to reduce these negative consequences while still supporting American agriculture. A safety net is needed, but payments should be decoupled from production.

Incentives for public benefits like clean water and conservation should replace payments for more and more bushels. Farmers and rural residents should be given entrepreneurial opportunities to diversify crops and grow for new and emerging markets.

Oklahoma farmers rely on a global market and our current subsidies jeopardize that market because of their price-distorting effects. But more importantly, in order for our economy to grow and prosper, we need growing economies all around the world – whether in Boise City, OK, or Djidian, Mali.

– The author farms and ranches in Reno County, KS and is lead organizer for Oxfam America's agriculture campaign. Oxfam America is an international development agency working on long-term solutions to poverty and hunger.

Gambling Addiction Impacting Oklahoma

An official estimates 35,000 to 70,000 Oklahomans – 1% to 2% of the state's population – have gambling problems.

Oklahoma has 129 trained gambling counselors who have successfully completed an aggressive list of requirements including completing more than 60 hours of approved training

They have passed a national certification exam and undergone more than 2,000 hours of supervision.

Regarding gambling counselors, Oklahoma is in better shape than it was when the state-run lottery was launched in the fall of 2005 but it is not where it needs to be. Three more are being hired.

Oklahoma has more than 80 tribal casinos, three racetrack casinos and the lottery. In comparison, Australia has 13 casinos, Canada 60, England 60, France 50 and Germany 50, according to the Oklahoma Association for Gambling Addiction Awareness.

ADULT PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLERS

About 2% to 4% of adults are pathological gamblers. Some estimates have as many as 10% of the population dealing with compulsive or problem gambling.

Warren Thompson is coordinator of the Oklahoma Employee Assistance Program, which serves some 27,000 state employees. The program takes care of any issues that inhibit an employee's on-the-job performance.

Thompson said he has seen at least a 40% rise in clients with gambling issues within the past year. Last year, he said, he had roughly three such cases. This year, he has had 45 since January.

A survey of Gamblers Anonymous members in the United States found that 48% had considered suicide and 13% had attempted it.

IT HAS IMPACTED FAMILIES

Gambling also is impacting Oklahoma families. Consider these two stories: One involved a 13-year-old who accumulated a \$32,000 debt gambling on the Internet over a six-week period while his parents were away from home.

Another was of a man who had gambled away money and the family transportation that was to take them home to another state. The man climbed a building in Tulsa, intent on jumping. Smith said the man received help, including transportation home.

The warning signs of problem gambling include:

- Increased frequency of gambling activity.

NEA Honors INDN's List Founder Free

INDN's List founder Kalyn Free was honored recently with the National Education Association's prestigious Leo Reano Memorial Award for her commitment and efforts to ensure American Indians have a seat – and a voice – at the nation's political table.

The award honors individuals who impact education and the achievement of equal opportunity for American Indians/Alaska Natives.

It is named for the late Leo Reano, a member of the Santo Domingo Indian Pueblo and a teacher, artist and interpreter.

A member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Free is founder and president of the Indigenous Democratic Network [INDN], also known as INDN's List.

This first-of-its-kind organization recruits, trains and funds American Indian candidates for public office and mobilizes the vote of American Indians nationwide.

"It is your mission as educators to inspire children to take leadership of their own lives and to tell them every day of the opportunities they have to affect positive change," Free said in accepting the award July 1 at the NEA's 41st Annual Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner in Philadelphia.

"Likewise, I founded INDN's List to inspire American Indians to take control of the circumstances of Indian Country by engaging in the political process and leading in their own communities. In our missions we share goals bigger than the routine tasks that consume our workdays. The broader goal of restoring hope to hopeless communities, of lighting the darkened paths called opportunity, is our aspiration."

After graduating from law school, Free became the youngest lawyer ever hired by the U.S. Department of Justice. During her 10 years at the Department of Justice, Free served as senior counsel in the Indian Resources Section where she supervised environmental litigation throughout American Indian country and earned a number of awards. She returned to southeastern Oklahoma and became the first woman elected District Attorney of Pittsburg and Haskell Counties, making victims' rights, domestic violence and child abuse top priorities.

After an unsuccessful bid for Congress in 2004, Free founded INDN's List.

"Taking on the challenge as Kalyn Free has to ensure that all – not a few, not some, but all – can be a part of this nation's dialogue through political action honors the legacy and spirit of Leo Reano and his contribution to the education and human and civil rights of American Indians," said NEA President Reg Weaver.

Reano, who died in 1971, served on the All Indian Pueblo Council and the NEA Council on Human Relations. He dedicated his life to securing educational opportunities for American Indian/Alaska Native children.

The NEA is the nation's largest professional organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

- Increased amount of money gambled.
- Spending an excessive amount of time gambling at the expense of a job or family time.
- Being preoccupied with gambling or with obtaining money with which to gamble.
- Gambling continues despite negative consequences such as financial problems.
- Using gambling as a means to cope with loneliness, anger, stress or depression.
- Bragging about wins but not talking about losses.
- Secretive behavior such as hiding lottery tickets and betting slips or having bills sent to work or another address.

Information on how to get help can be obtained through the state Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services online at www.odmhsas.org/Gambling.htm

distinguished pulpit series mayflower congregational church, ucc

july 15 — nancy claire pittman

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

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

july 22 — jesse williams, jr

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

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

august 5 — doug manning

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

august 12 — rev. lance schmitz

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

august 12 — kay bessler northcutt

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

Dr. Robin Meyers invites you to expand your mind by visiting Mayflower Congregational Church this summer. From July 8 through August 12 where a diverse group of speakers will share their ideas for living faithfully. Mayflower is located at 3901 NW 63rd between Portland and Northwest Expressway, 405.842.8897. The service is held at 10:45 am.

PUBLIC FORUM

How To Deal With Journalists' Opinions

By Pat Piety

Back in the 1980s, I attended a luncheon for journalists at which the featured speaker was Mike Lacey, then co-owner of the Phoenix New Times, one of those free, no-holds-barred, tabloid-style newsweeklies.

The difference between his paper and the Arizona Republic, Mike declared, was that the Arizona Republic pretended to be nonpartisan and objective, while the New Times made no bones about the political views of its publishers, editors and writers.

No human being is totally objective, Mike insisted, and to pretend otherwise could be misleading to readers.

His statement has stuck with me over the years. To be sure, every responsible journalist has an ethical obligation to give the news to the public straight – to report only the facts without embellishing or manipulating them to make them fit the reporter's ideology. That's an explicit policy of all responsible news outlets. Anyone who thinks about it will realize how important this principle is in a democracy.

SLANTING NEWS UNACCEPTABLE

Suppose a reporter felt the same way you did about an issue and made every effort to slant the news toward your point of view. You might not find anything wrong with his or her reporting.

But suppose the opposite were true and the reporter was slanting the news the other way. You would almost surely be outraged, writing angry letters to the editor and accusing the paper of being biased – and rightly so.

Reporters must report the facts, not their personal opinions, so readers can make up their own minds about the issues.

That's not to say, however, that the best journalist is one who has no opinion on the issues.

OPEN-MINDEDNESS COMPLEMENTS OPINIONS

Even if one were to make such a silly rule, it would be impossible to enforce. Human beings have opinions, although responsible people try to keep an open mind and be prepared to change their opinions if new information warrants do-



THE DEATH OF NEWSPAPERS.

BY CAGLE FOR MSNBC.COM

ing so.

There is a place for opinion in newspapers – on the editorial, or “opinion” page. But even on the opinion page, ethical columnists and editorial writers have an obligation not to deliberately distort the truth, say things that are untrue, leave out important facts that might invalidate their arguments, or use devious persuasion techniques of the sort used by a few advertisers to sell products and propagandists to promote political candidates and ideologies.

It all comes down to reliability. Over time, responsible readers who get their information from a number of sources with a variety of editorial opinions will learn which news outlets and reporters they can rely on to report the news fairly and objectively. When this is true, the journalists' personal views are not an obstacle, even if they sometimes conflict with those of some readers.

I believe things would be better for newspapers and their readers if we would stop pretending that the people we rely on for the news should have no opinion about it.

– The author writes for the Stillwater NewsPress

The Methods Behind My 'Lunacy'

By Karen Webb

I actually have my picture on a webpage called Fringefolk and I am very proud of it. It has been there since about April 2001. Bush said we were a “tiny lunatic fringe,” but we got bigger. I was there protesting Bush, and all things Republican that I have a problem with, before 9/11. I have done it in a lot of free speech zones and several time zones.

There are only a few issues I really get testy about and I intend to stay testy. A woman has a right to choose and that includes every woman, even a poor woman. A woman or girl has the right to every piece of information that might prevent an unwanted pregnancy, period.

Homosexuals should have exactly the same rights I have and that includes marriage to any consenting adult who will put up with them. They should have all the benefits and tortures that come with it.

I am against the death penalty and tort reforms that take rights away from the injured party and I am for union rights and separation of church and state. Most of those issues are in the Democratic platform.

Oh, and I am against allowing [state Rep.] Sally Kern or anyone else decide what books can be in the public library. I own all the books they want in the Adults Only Children's Section. It still sounds stupid, doesn't it?

I am sure there are other issues, but those are the ones I am testy about that involve the Legislature.

WHY GIVE DEMOCRATS A PASS?

I find it appalling that people think it is perfectly all right to go after Republicans with “venom,” but “leave Democrats alone” who support the same disgusting stuff. George W. Bush has been doing that very thing of late. Democrats opposing the war or something he is doing are being political, but Republicans doing the same thing are OK.

“Irresponsible and unwarranted attacks on fellow Democrats particularly our legislators are destructive and dangerous to the well being of the party.”

I guess I am just not that much of a party animal to give up my soul for the Oklahoma Democratic Party. Irresponsible and unwarranted are in the eye of the beholder. If their votes are being destructive or dangerous to my well-being or the well-being of people I care about, I will let them know.

Sometimes I try to make it sarcastic and funny, but not every issue lends itself to funny.

SILENT, NO MORE

My days of cozying up to the GOP or tolerating those who do are long past. Those days of “ignore it and it will go away” started feeling a little sick during the Reagan years, were diagnosed as terminal during the first Bush presidency, were in hospice care during the Clinton impeachment hearings, were in the last throes when Dubya was elected and were dead and buried when we invaded Iraq and they passed the Patriot Act.

Ralph Jackson's Letter

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

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

Ms. Webb should leave our Democrats alone and save her venom for the Republicans. Those who cannot speak well of a Democrat should not speak ill of him or her or them.

Editor's Note: This letter appeared in the June 25 Observer.

With Bush chipping away at my rights and especially women's rights there is no way I will sit quietly while Democrats help.

Consensus is always a one-way street in the Oklahoma Democratic Party and involves going right toward the GOP and never, ever left toward the lunatic fringe.

NOT FIRST TIME TO BE LABELED 'LUNATIC FRINGE'

Well, Ralph Jackson, you aren't the first to call me part of the lunatic fringe. You aren't even in the first 100 or maybe 1,000. I don't think I am a scattergun attacker, though, because I usually name those I am upset with who are legislators or congressmen.

I support Ralph Jackson's constitutional right to call me a lunatic and I always will.

I don't know what he meant by, “There are those within our party who unfortunately have suicidal tendencies.” I don't have any of those. I am here for the long haul and it will be long since the Supreme Court isn't on my side. I would say our side, but Ralph might think I am speaking for everyone.

“Those who cannot speak well of a Democrat should not speak ill of him or her or them.” Them that aren't him or hers? If one of “them” is elected, which isn't likely in Oklahoma, and “them” votes against women or gays, I will probably speak ill of “them.”

I could send Ralph one of my business cards. They say, “speak up or they think you agree.” I made up my mind that after Reagan I would never just sit there, again.

– The author lives in Moore

Halliburton Books Being Questioned

By Jonathan Bloomberg

Investors have shrugged off almost all the bad news at Oklahoma based Halliburton Co., the past few years, including accusations of over-billing the Army and bribing foreign officials, along with scrutiny over business dealings in Iran and non-compete bids on government work.

Instead of tanking, the company's stock has soared. The same investors might take notice, though, if Halliburton's financial statements are in doubt, and a former company accounting executive says they are.

Anthony Menendez, who was Halliburton's director of technical accounting research and training, has gone public.

He is accusing the world's second-largest oil field-services company of using so-called bill-and-hold accounting and other undisclosed practices to "distort the timing of billions of dollars in revenue."

In short, Menendez says this allowed Halliburton to book product sales improperly, before they occurred.

LABOR DEPARTMENT GETS COMPLAINT

The allegations are part of a 54-page complaint Menendez filed against Halliburton with a Labor Department administrative law judge in Covington, LA, who released the records in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

Menendez, who resigned last year and is seeking unspecified damages, says Halliburton retaliated against him in violation of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act's whistle-blower provisions after he reported his concerns to the Securities and Exchange Commission and the company's audit committee.

Halliburton has denied the allegations. Spokeswoman Cathy Mann says Halliburton's audit committee "directed an independent investigation" and "concluded that the allegations were without merit."

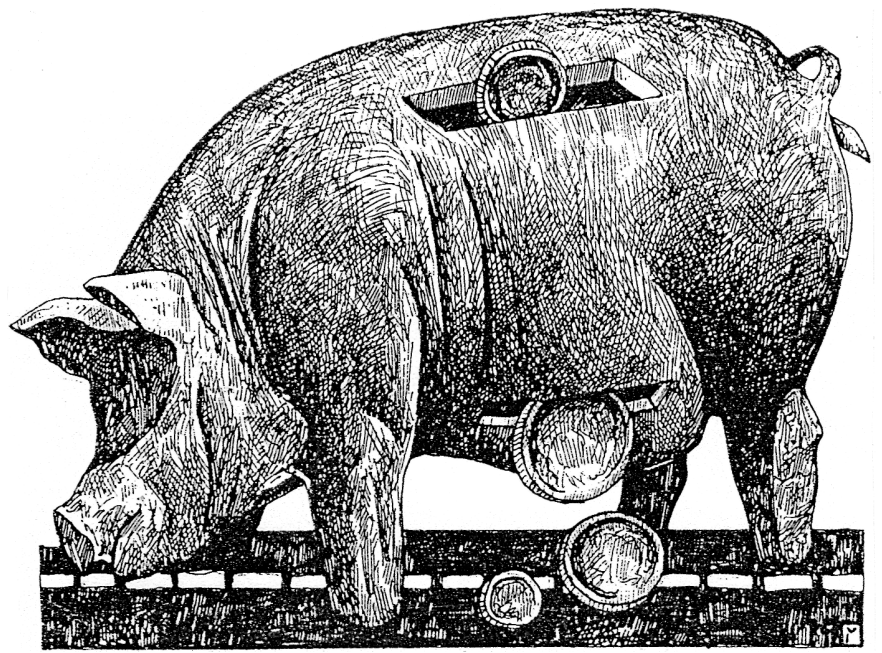
She declined to comment on bill-and-hold issues, and Halliburton's court filings in the case don't provide any details about its accounting practices.

THERE IS CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Investors, of course, will care more about the reliability of Halliburton's numbers than whether Menendez wins his complaint. A look at internal Halliburton documents Menendez filed with the court suggests there's reason for concern.

Here's how Menendez, who reported to Halliburton's chief accounting officer, summed up the bill-and-hold issue in his complaint:

"For example, the company recognizes revenue when the goods are parked in company warehouses, rather than delivered to the customer. Typically, these goods are not even assembled and ready for the customer.



"Furthermore, it is unknown as to when the goods will be ultimately assembled, tested, delivered to the customer and, finally, used by the company to perform the required oilfield services for the customer."

If true, that would violate generally accepted accounting principles. For companies to recognize revenue before delivery, "the risks of ownership must have passed to the buyer," the SEC's staff wrote in a 2003 accounting bulletin.

DISCOVERS 'TERRIBLY FLAWED' FLOW CHART

Shortly after joining Halliburton in March 2005, Menendez says he discovered a "terribly flawed" flow chart on the company's in-house Web site, called the Bill and Hold Decision Tree.

The flow chart, a copy of which Menendez included in his complaint, walks through what to do in a situation where a "customer has been billed for completed inventory which is being stored at a Halliburton facility."

You don't have to be an accountant to see the problem.

"The policy in the chart is clearly at odds with generally accepted accounting principles," says Charles Mulford, a Georgia Institute of Technology accounting professor who reviewed the court records. "It's very clear cut. It's not gray."

Bill-and-hold was at the heart of Sunbeam Corp.'s collapse in the late '90s, and later blowups at Qwest Communications International Inc. and Nortel Networks Corp.

Menendez, who now works as a consultant, also accuses Halliburton of improper accounting for income taxes, off-balance sheet entities and foreign-currency adjustments.

Halliburton seemed to quell doubts about its books back in August 2004, when it paid \$7.5 million to settle a two-year SEC investigation.

© Bloomberg News

McAlester Connection

Depleted Uranium Is Attacked By Activists

By Karl Swartz

Lori Brim cradled her son in her arms for three months before he died at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington.

Dustin Brim, a 22-year-old Army specialist, had collapsed three years ago in Iraq from a very aggressive cancer that attacked his kidney, caused a mass to grow over his esophagus and collapsed a lung.

The problems she saw during her time at Walter Reed, including her son screaming in pain while doctors argued over medications, had nothing to do with mold and shabby conditions documented in recent news reports.

What this mother saw was an unexplainable illness consuming her son. And what she has learned since her son's death is that his was not an isolated case.

CONCERNED CITIZENS ARE MOBILIZING

Lori Brim has joined other parents, hundreds of other sick soldiers, legislators, research scientists and environmental activists who say the cause of their problems results from exposure to depleted uranium, a radioactive metal used in the manufacture of U.S. tank armor and weapon casings.

The so-called "bunker busters" are assembled at the Army Ammunition Depot in McAlester. Union members refused to work with the depleted uranium, fashioning only the bomb.

The Army contracted out to a private company to attach the depleted uranium to the nose cone of the bomb.

Health and environmental effects of depleted uranium are at the heart of scientific studies, a lawsuit in the New York courts and legislative bills in more than a dozen states.

NEWS STORIES SURFACING WORLDWIDE

News stories claiming negative signs of depleted uranium's impact, including death and birth defects, are surfacing from Australia to England to the Far East.

The controversy rages within government bodies and underlies the theme of TV shows like a recent episode of the medical series "House."

While the military continues to deny the connection of depleted uranium to sicknesses that plague returning servicemen and women, a newly mandated study stemming from legislation signed by President Bush is underway.

Despite a 1996 U.N. resolution opposing its use because of discovery of health problems after the first Gulf War, the military studies have concluded there was no evidence that exposure to the metal caused illnesses.

To the military, the effectiveness of weapons and armor made with depleted

uranium outweighs any residual effects. Their bottom line: Depleted uranium saves soldiers' lives in combat.

Robert Holloway, president of Nevada Technical Associates Inc., a firm that specializes in radiation safety training, disputes any concern over depleted uranium.

But Brim and others think there will not be enough known until soldiers are tested for exposure. They compare the debate over depleted uranium to the controversy surrounding Agent Orange.

Getting Rid Of Tattoos Is Easier

If you are one of thousands of Oklahomans who have gotten tattoos and want rid of them, help may be on the way.

For help, check stores where nurses use lasers in a series of treatments to break down tattoo pigments. It is part of a growing industry catering to people who may not have thought about the implications of "forever" the first time around.

Removing tattoos is costly, uncomfortable and time-consuming, but the affinity for body art is so strong that some people say they do it to clear space to tattoo all over again.

Many dermatologists specialize in laser tattoo removal, and some laser hair-removal centers are adding services.

Most clients are women ages 25 to 35. Women are getting more tattoos than they used to and have a higher level of tattoo regret than men.

On the horizon is a development that could change the very nature of tattooing: a type of ink encapsulated in beads and designed to break up after one treatment with a special laser.

The technology for the ink, called Freedom-2, was developed by scientists from Massachusetts General Hospital, and Brown and Duke Universities. It is to go on sale this fall.

There are no hard statistics on tattoo removal, but a laser manufacturer estimated 100,000 laser tattoo removal treatments so far this year in America.

Bush Court Blind To Gender Discrimination

By Danny M. Adkison

It is a new Supreme Court. Not only is the new Supreme Court hearing fewer cases and cases of less significance [which may not be a bad thing], but the Roberts-Alito Court is clearly signaling a new era. Justice Ginsburg took extreme steps to make this point recently [doing something she had never done before during her tenure on the court].

The case was one that was of the type for which Justice Ginsburg is particularly sensitive: women's rights. Justice Ginsburg, a paragon of civility who shuns conflict, read her dissent from the bench [generally viewed as a public rebuke to the winning side].

Linda Greenhouse, the Pulitzer Prize winning Supreme Court beat reporter for the New York Times, noted that had Justice Ginsburg still had her colleague Justice O'Connor on the court this case would have been decidedly different. That is because it would have been decided differently.

The case involved a female worker for Goodyear who realized that she was paid much lower than men working for Goodyear who were basically performing the same work. A clear case of gender discrimination.

CLEAR CASE OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

That is not editorializing – it really was a clear case of gender discrimination. Even the two newest members, Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Alito, and the remaining three justices making up the slight majority [Thomas, Scalia and Kennedy] would admit to this.

And shame on Justice Thomas. He chaired the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission earlier in his career. He should be particularly sensitive to this kind of discrimination [and the present-day EEOC backed the plaintiff].

The question in this case was not whether or not the plaintiff was a victim of gender discrimination [she was]. The issue was whether or not she had filed her lawsuit in a timely fashion.

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act stipulates that a plaintiff suing over sexual discrimination must file the suit within 180 days "after the alleged unlawful employment practice occurred."

MISSING JUSTICE O'CONNOR

This is where Justice Ginsburg and – had she been there – Justice O'Connor have a particularly useful insight. The other five justices couldn't understand why the woman waited so long to sue Goodyear over the wage discrimination. Justice Ginsburg made it all perfectly clear. Two things.

One, salaries are not something that employees talk about openly. In fact, some employers even instruct their employees to not discuss such matters with

Three More Bad Rulings From Bush's Court

The Supreme Court hit the trifecta: Three cases involving the First Amendment. Three dismayed decisions by Chief Justice John Roberts' new conservative majority.

Chief Justice Roberts and the four others in his ascendant bloc used the next-to-last decision day of this term to reopen the political system to a new flood of special-interest money, to weaken protection of student expression and to make it harder for citizens to challenge government violations of the separation of church and state.

In the process, the reconfigured court extended its noxious habit of casting aside precedents without acknowledging it – insincere judicial modesty scorned by Justice Antonin Scalia in a concurring opinion.

PHONY CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

First, campaign finance. Four years ago, a differently constituted court upheld sensible provisions of the McCain-Feingold Act designed to prevent corporations and labor unions from circumventing the ban on their spending in federal campaigns by bankrolling phony "issue ads."

These ads purport to just educate voters about a policy issue, but are really aimed at a particular candidate.

The 2003 ruling correctly found that the bogus issue ads were the functional equivalent of campaign ads and upheld the Congressional restrictions on corporate and union money.

Yet the Roberts court shifted course in response to sham issue ads run on radio and TV by a group called Wisconsin Right to Life with major funding from corporations opposed to Sen. Russell Feingold, the Democrat who co-authored the act.

It opened a big new loophole in time to do mischief in the 2008 elections.

The exact extent of the damage is unclear. But the four dissenters were correct in warning that the court's hazy new standard for assessing these ads is bound to invite evasion and fresh public cynicism about big money and politics.

PIOUS LANGUAGE DISGUISES THE TRUTH

The decision contained a lot of pious language about protecting free speech. But magnifying the voice of wealthy corporations and unions over the voice of candidates and private citizens is hardly a free speech victory.

Moreover, the professed devotion to the First Amendment did not extend to allowing taxpayers to challenge White House aid to faith-based organizations as a violation of church-state separation. The controlling opinion by Justice Samuel Alito offers a cockeyed reading of precedent and flimsy distinctions between executive branch initiatives and Congressionally authorized spending to deny private citizens standing to sue.

AN ADULT
WOMAN



AN ADULT
WOMAN
IN THE EYES
OF THE
SUPREME
COURT



each other.

Two, even if a woman were to be made aware of such discrimination, she is inclined to keep her mouth shut in hopes of rectifying such matters through diplomacy rather than, as they say, making waves. Complaining early on about pay is a sure prescription to finding yourself having to search for another job. Justice Ginsburg convincingly articulated this in her dissent.

She is well qualified to do so. It was none other than Justice Ginsburg herself who help the Supreme Court formulate the heightened scrutiny standard used in gender discrimination cases in the 1970s [when the court first struck down such discrimination]. This term the court already has ignored precedent in its ruling on partial-birth abortions. Now this.

CONGRESS WILL TACKLE ISSUE?

There is, however, a bright side. This case is unique and its uniqueness makes its likelihood of being overridden more certain.

That is because this was not a constitutional case. The case was based on an interpretation of a federal law. It is quite similar to a gender-discrimination case involving pregnancy and disability pay that was decided by the court in the early years of gender discrimination cases. In that earlier 1977 decision the court refused to include difficult pregnancies that caused women to miss work as a disability covered by federal law.

That decision was quickly overruled. Usually this statement cannot be made about Supreme Court decisions. But when a decision is predicated on statutory interpretation, all that has to be done to overrule it is for Congress to change the law in such a manner that makes the court's ruling wrong.

Most Supreme Court decisions are based on an interpretation of the Constitution, meaning the only way to overrule them [assuming the Court won't] is by the difficult one of amending the Constitution.

Will the Congress make the changes to overrule the Roberts-Alito lead decision in this case? The day the decision was handed down Sen. Hillary Clinton announced she would introduce a bill in the Senate to do that very thing.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

That permits the White House to escape accountability when it improperly spends tax money for religious purposes.

Nor did the court's concern for free speech extend to actually allowing free speech in the oddball case of an Alaska student who was suspended from high school in 2002 after he unfurled a banner reading "Bong Hits 4 Jesus" while the Olympic torch passed.

The ruling by Chief Justice Roberts said public officials did not violate the student's rights by punishing him for words that promote a drug message at an off-campus event.

This oblique reference to drugs hardly justifies such mangling of sound precedent and the First Amendment.

© The New York Times

Bob Lemon Honored For LGBT Support

Bob Lemon, a staunch Oklahoma Democrat and devoted supporter of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality, is the 2007 recipient of the Margaret Tyson Award presented annually by the Oklahoma Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus.

The honor is bestowed on an outstanding individual who demonstrates long-term commitment to the furtherance of LGBT equality under the law, and who is a role model for changing public opinion.

In accepting the award at a recent banquet in Oklahoma City, Lemon rejected the notion that LGBT citizens are second-rate Americans in need of counseling. "Gay people aren't broken and don't need fixing," he said.

Lemon also had the honor of reading a proclamation from the Oklahoma Legislature, recognizing LGBT Pride events in Oklahoma City issued by Sen. Andrew Rice and Rep. Al McAffrey, both Democrats in their first term of office and staunch supporters of LGBT equality.

Lemon, an Oklahoma City attorney, also is a top supporter of Stonewall Democrats [www.okstonewall.org], the LGBT voice of the state and national Democratic Parties, with chapters in all 50 states and Washington, DC.

For more information on the Oklahoma Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus, go to www.oglp.com.

BOOKS

America Self-Absorbed And Imperialistic

By Alvena Bieri

A BUSH & BOTOX WORLD
Travels Through Bush's America
By Saul Landau
AK Press
176 pages, \$15

We need more political writers like Saul Landau. In his brand new book he lays out in stark language and startling detail just how both our politics and our culture have deteriorated.

It's not just George W. Bush that he blames. It is the long-lasting fact of America's ruthless march toward empire and our selfish culture. By the way, Gore Vidal wrote the foreword; short but good.

What about "Botox" in the title? Landau is referring to our widespread self-absorption as played upon by a major advertising industry. In other words while five or six billion inhabitants of this planet are barely getting by, many Americans are concentrating on their wrinkles and how to get rid of them. Our politics and culture are extremely selfish, he thinks.

Landau explains, "Just as Botox erases wrinkles – for a short time – Bush's Botox approach to politics, like badly wrinkled skin, also revealed itself as something getting old very fast." Then he characterizes our President as "a man unable to deal with suffering and death" despite the fact that he has caused so much of both.

USING WAR TO ACHIEVE 'GREATNESS'

It is uncomfortable, disappointing, and sad all at the same time to reflect on the darker history of our country's use of war to achieve what some like to call our "greatness."

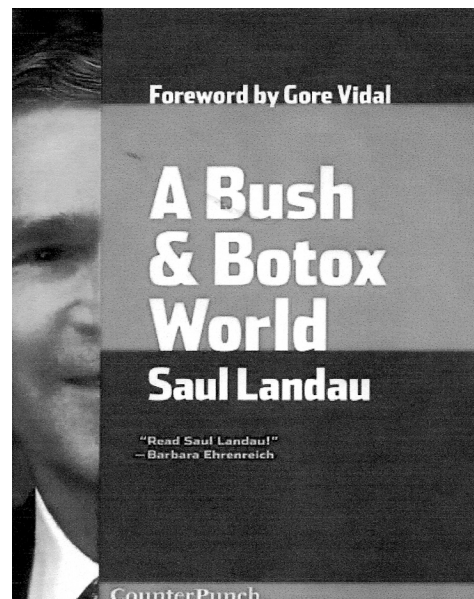
All you have to do is read Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, and then Landau's analysis of our highly militaristic past to understand.

The countries to the south of us are just one good example of a long-expanding empire. In the past the U.S. has invaded or interfered with the governments of Latin America, republics from Chile to Nicaragua to Grenada to Cuba.

Big corporations like the United Fruit Company have long been eager to have our government help them stay dominant in their trade as they work to avoid paying taxes or following any environmental regulations. Sometimes, Landau says, this system is called "free trade."

AMERICAN IMPERIALISM DETAILED

U.S. relations with Cuba are a close-up chapter in the imperialism story from the war with Spain in 1898 to the present. What will stick with me after reading



about Fidel Castro's Cuba in 2007 is the fact that Cuba's doctor-patient ratio is similar to that of Beverly Hills!

So viewed from the perspective of the last 100 years, our invasion of Iraq should not be a surprise to anyone. Landau thinks that "in the name of the Prince of Peace, the Lords of War in Washington bombed and invaded Afghanistan and Iraq."

The other theme of the book is just as comprehensive and important as the political one. That is how shortsighted our consumer culture is. Do you remember Vance Packard's book *The Hidden Persuaders* of many years ago on the subject of advertising? It is more relevant than ever.

Landau is hard on our attitudes toward buying and consuming in a mindless way. "Logos, brands, and vicarious identification have sucked reason from the modern consumer brain," he says.

Aggression not only dominates our politics but our airwaves as well. American ads are used all over the world and have become a sort of modern missionary activity.

FASHIONISM TRUMPS FASCISM

He believes that "instead of pushing Jesus on the natives," advertising pushes "soap, hair spray, and drugs that take U.S. consumers up, down, and sideways – and promise to cure their impotence and acne."

So in his opinion, we are prey not so much "to Fascism as to Fashionism." Example: Janet Jackson's now famous "wardrobe malfunction" was more important on TV news that day than a report that our military was getting overextended in Iraq.

Not only is our country in need of some new and strong moral leadership. Our media and general culture have little sense of proportion or "guiding intellect."

We should be very thankful for a book like this. I hope that Landau is working on another project. That would be to use the same direct language and approach to tell us more of what we can do to change things!

– The author lives in Stillwater

Not Enough Grapes, Plenty Of Wrath

By Norm Rourke

HARPSONG

By Rilla Askew
University of Oklahoma Press
246 pages, \$24.95

Harpsong. The title sings as does the story. Sometimes disturbing as good people struggled during the Depression, *Harpsong* is an anthem to the human spirit.

Harlan Singer, a wanderer like so many of that era, steals the hearts of the Thompson family and their daughter Sharon. Soon he and his 14-year-old bride are part of an odyssey with others riding rails, hitchhiking and all with no particular destination.

Unlike *Grapes of Wrath* – a mostly incomplete account of Oklahoma during the Depression – *Harpsong* was written by a native Oklahoman, not a carpetbagger who never visited the locale written about. Rilla Askew tells a wonderful and desperate story of those who stayed behind to deal with their fate.

As one unnamed speaker says: "The Joads wouldn't have left out from Salisaw or anywhere else around here on account of tractors and dust. They might have left, but it wouldn't have been due to tractors and dust, no matter what some stranger might have wrote in a book. Truth is, some left, but most stayed, dumb as lambs to the slaughter maybe, but we were determined to live with the devil we knew. That devil wore a few different faces."

HOOVERVILLES AND THE RAILS

With Harlan and Sharon, we live in hobo jungles, Hoovervilles and ride the rails in a giant figure eight with Oklahoma in the pinched middle. Always returning to Oklahoma, but never coming home, Sharon follows Harlan on his search for a somewhat mystical and mysterious friend. Along the way, Harlan Singer becomes another folk hero.

Harpsong is a love story blended with history, folk tradition, adventure and renewal. The harshness of the times and the generosity of those with anything to share is also part of the story.

It is a story of despair and perseverance, of love and brutality; a story of wayfarer orphans searching for home only to find there is no home to return to. It is

a story of hard luck people struggling in hard times Oklahoma, of bank foreclosures and failing farms. It is a story of faith and endurance.

NEWS ACCOUNTS AND PERSONAL HISTORY

Askew draws on newspaper accounts of events from this time period and her own Oklahoma heritage. She reveals that not everyone left Oklahoma with Steinbeck's Joad family and that many of Oklahoma's folk heroes grew out of this era.

Askew was born and raised in Eastern Oklahoma and knows whereof she writes. She is the author of a collection of stories, *Strange Business*, which won the Oklahoma Book Award and two other award-winning novels, *The Mercy Seat* and *Fire in Beulah*.

For the rest of the story about Oklahoma's Depression years and its people, *Harpsong* tells it like it was.

Harpsong is the first in the Oklahoma Stories and Storytellers series to be published by the OU Press.

– The author lives in Beggs

DeLay's Adultery Different

In his new book, Tom DeLay criticizes Newt Gingrich for, among other things, conducting an affair with a Capitol Hill employee during the 1998 impeachment trial of Bill Clinton.

The woman later became Gingrich's third wife

"Yes, I don't think that Newt could set a high moral standard, a high moral tone, during that moment," DeLay said.

"You can't do that if you're keeping secrets about your own adulterous affairs."

He added that the impeachment trial was another of his "proudest moments." The difference between his own adultery and Gingrich's, he said, "is that I was no longer committing adultery by that time, the impeachment trial. There's a big difference."

– The New Yorker

The Prison Industry Robs Lives, Taxes

By Van Jones

For too long the incarceration industry has gotten away with high costs and low performance. It is time to introduce accountability, competition and rational incentives into the nation's prison systems – both public and private.

Federal and state governments spend more than \$35 billion a year to lock up a greater portion of the population – one out of 138 Americans – than any other country on earth.

The prison population keeps growing, mainly because our recidivism rates are sky-high. Half of former inmates return to prison. It is time to ask:

What are we getting for the dollars spent on this growing revolving-door system?

[Editor's Note: In Oklahoma, no other individual feeds the prison industry with more gusto than Gov. Brad Henry, refusing even to parole those recommended by the State Parole Board – less than 32%. He makes ex-Gov. Frank Keating look like a piker.]

Certainly prisoners should take personal responsibility for their own actions and their own rehabilitation. But with smart programs, many more should be finishing their sentences and coming home to be taxpaying citizens, not lifelong drains on the state's coffers.

WHERE ARE THE INCENTIVES?

Why are so many failing to rehabilitate themselves? One way to ask that question is this: Where are the financial incentives for prisons to properly perform their rehabilitative function?

If anything, the captains of the incarceration industry have a perverse incentive to rehabilitate as few people as possible and keep business booming.

I am not saying that jailers do this consciously or purposefully. But the system is so broken that the very people we entrust to rehabilitate prisoners actually profit from prolonged prisoner stays and quick prisoner returns.

Take, for instance, the correctional officers union in California. This union has become one of the state's top political contributors. It has pushed not just for higher wages but for tougher laws and longer sentences.

The more people in jail, the more prisons [and prison guards] we need.

And the longer the sentences of those convicted, the more secure the jobs in the prison. We now have a system that is divorced from its original purpose, which is to ensure neighborhood security, not job security.

FOR-PROFIT PRISONS ADDICTED TO CASH

Some states have turned to for-profit firms to run their prisons. But these private firms quickly get addicted to the government cash. They, too, have poor rehabilitation rates and spend their time lobbying state legislatures for tougher laws and longer sentences.



If you want to take on a big, failing, self-dealing bureaucracy that succeeds [and grows] by betraying the public interest, don't focus on the welfare system.

Deal with the prison system. California spends \$7.4 billion a year on prisons, more than on all its four-year colleges and universities combined.

Nearly a dime out of every state dollar goes into California prisons, which house 170,000 inmates. What return do Californians get on their investment? An alarming 57% recidivism rate.

How can we justify continuing to spend \$40,000 to \$100,000 annually per inmate in neighborhoods where we spend less than \$9,000 per pupil?

- We should offer financial rewards to wardens who have the lowest recidivism rates over a period of years.
- Hold prisons accountable for the billions of dollars they spend each year.
- Increase funding for those that send people home who stay out of trouble.
- Decrease funding for those that send people home who then get into trouble.
- And close altogether those prisons that are notorious for being virtual crime universities.

Rather than blindly and endlessly funding prisons, why shouldn't states instead create what I call community safety superfunds, which would force the incarcerators [public and private] to compete with entrepreneurs, community programs and even other branches of government for those dollars?

If a community-based program can do a better job at keeping people out of prison with dimes than incarcerators have been doing with dollars, let's reallocate those funds. YouthBuild USA, for instance, works with unemployed 16- to 24-year-olds to prepare them for a high school diploma while learning job skills. Let's send more money their way.

- The author heads the Ella Baker Center of Oakland which helps young people in and out of prison.

© Forbes

Labor Unions Bid To Influence Farm Policy

By Ian Swanson

The AFL-CIO and other major labor unions for the first time are aiming to influence farm policy by partnering with conservation groups that seek greater funding for programs benefiting U.S. hunters and fishers.

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka said his organization became involved after learning from an informal poll that 70% of the membership of 20 unions hunt and fish, and that those members were worried about access to land and a lack of habitat.

Increasing conservation funding "is a very high priority for us," said Trumka, who described himself as an active outdoorsman. He described the 2007 farm bill as "absolutely" the No. 1 conservation issue for the AFL-CIO.

The unions are just one of several new players in the debate over farm policy, which could complicate efforts by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Colin Peterson, D-MN, and others to craft a farm bill.

CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

"I think there is certainly a change in the air that I never experienced before and people want to move onto reform," said Rep. Ron Kind, D-WI, a leading proponent for reform who opposed the 2002 farm bill.

Another new player is Oxfam America, which recently hired Clinton adminis-

tration Agriculture Undersecretary Jim Lyons as its vice president and is making the farm bill its U.S. agency priority for the year

The bill is creating some strange bedfellows. Budget watchdogs, environmental groups and one of Washington's largest trade associations, the Grocery Manufacturers Association, have put their weight behind legislation that would change drastically the farm-subsidy system and in turn fund more conservation and nutrition programs across the country.

IT IS A NEW MOVEMENT FOR UNIONS

Unions traditionally have not engaged directly in the formation of farm bills, but are speaking out now because they "have a keen interest in advocating for our members' interests not only in the workplace but also in the fields, forests and waters so many of them spend their hard-earned time in," the letter said.

Other unions signing the letter include the United Steelworkers of America, the International Association of Fire Fighters and the United Mine Workers of America.

Unions have already contributed \$1.2 million to make the launch of the partnership of the Union Sportsmen's Alliance successful.

© The Hill

Sears Supporting Employee Troops

By Joye Swain

Could we each buy at least one thing at Sears this year?

How does Sears treat its employees who are called up for military duty?

By law, they are required to hold their jobs open and available, but nothing more.

Usually, people take a big pay cut and lose benefits as a result of being called up. Sears is voluntarily paying the difference in salaries and benefits, including medical insurance and bonus programs, for all called up reservist employees for up to two years.

I submit that Sears is an exemplary corporate citizen and should be recognized for its contribution. I suggest we all shop at Sears, and be sure to find a manager to tell them why we are there so the company gets the positive reinforcement it well deserves.

I decided to check this before I sent it forward. So I sent the following email to

the Sears Customer Service Department:

"I would like to know if it is true. If it is, the Internet may have just become one very good source of advertisement for your company. I know I would go out of my way to buy products from Sears instead of another store for a like item, even if it's cheaper at that store."

This is their answer to my e-mail: "Dear Customer: Thank you for contacting Sears. The information is factual. We appreciate your positive feedback.

"Sears regards service to our country as one of greatest sacrifices our young men and women can make. We are happy to do our part to lessen the burden they bear at this time."

signed/Bill Thorn, Sears Customer Care

Please pass this on to all your friends. Sears needs to be recognized for this outstanding contribution and we need to show them, as Americans, we do.

New Baptist Altar Call

The Unification Of Church And State

By Don Wilkey

Old Testament King Saul imposed himself upon the office of the priesthood in violation of his calling to be a secular king. His attempt to blend the offices and override distinctly different administrations brought about the judgment of God.

It is sad that many modern believers don't heed the lesson of Saul. They insist in blending the political with the sacred.

In days gone by, the late Rev. W.A. Criswell of First Baptist Dallas used to go outside on the church steps to call a press conference announcing whom he was backing for national office.

Times, they are a changing. What once was taboo is now becoming standard procedure.

PASSING THE PLATE FOR GOP CANDIDATES

The merger of church and secular politics is so common now that one church in Austin took up an offering for GOP candidates much to the shock of its treasurer.

Our church received an endorsement of a local candidate for Congress on the letterhead of a Baptist church signed by the pastor.

The pastor went further in bringing the candidate down in front of his congregation and laying hands on him in a type of ordination service for his candidacy.

We Baptists have a tradition called the altar call. Usually at the end of the service, it is when the saints are given a chance to repent or unbelievers are coaxed to come join the faith.

ALTAR CALL FOR VOTER REGISTRATION

Rick Scarborough, a Texas religious right leader, leads church worship services offering an invitation to register in a political party during the invitation hymn.

Scarborough admonishes pastors to stand behind pulpits and proclaim whom they are voting for. [Legal experts claim this is not allowed.] This is a radical departure from Baptist protocol, but it is becoming more common.

The Baptist church in North Carolina that kicked out church Democrats is a

Southern Baptists Split Over Politics

No one should be surprised by all the GOP political attention on Baptists. Now 16.3 million strong, the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest single bloc of America's 30 million fundamentalists voters.

Many Baptist pastors have sympathy for Southern Baptists who are worried about closeness to Republicans.

They are valid concerns but SBC leaders said they could be mitigated if there is responsible dialogue with candidates, not an acquiesce to everything they say.

"Responsible Christian citizenship calls us to be in dialogue with people of every party," according to an SBC spokesman.

An increasing number of Southern Baptists prefer their denomination would quit cozying up to the Republican Party, given the war in Iraq and corruption being uncovered almost daily in Washington.

An increasing number of Baptists believe that as a denomination the SBC should stay out of politics altogether.

TOO COZY WITH REPUBLICANS?

A vocal number of pastors believe the denomination is too cozy with Republicans and too political in general.

By flirting with the line separating good citizenship and a grab for power, they say, a denomination already experiencing flat membership risks alienating more people.

Others contend such talk might inspire Southern Baptists to retreat from the public square and cede ground on urgent social issues such as abortion.

If anything, the debate is likely to become even more magnified in the coming months because no one Republican candidate has captured the conservative evangelical imagination - and all of them are trying, even adulterers and pro-abortion candidates.

"Most younger Southern Baptist leaders would strongly affirm good citizenship and voting and involvement in the political process," said Marty Duren, 43, a Georgia pastor.

"But they don't confound personal involvement with organizing for political power, which we saw in organizations like the Moral Majority."

LEADERS ATTEND REPUBLICAN EVENT

Duren also cited national Southern Baptist leaders who joined politicians at "Justice Sunday" events promoting conservative judicial appointments in 2005 and 2006.

Fundamentalists of every persuasion are delighted that Bush appointments have led to five Catholics on the Supreme Court, a solid majority. They hope to see Roe v. Wade declared unconstitutional.

In San Antonio at the SBC convention, Duren proposed an anti-partisanship resolution urging convention leaders "to exercise great restraint when speaking on behalf of Southern Baptists so as not to intermingle their personal political persuasions with their chief responsibility to represent Jesus Christ and this convention."

"GOD IS ALWAYS SEARCHING OUR HEARTS AND MINDS. HE'S KIND OF LIKE SANTA CLAUS."

PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH

AAAUGGHH!!



case in point.

The pastor used the pulpit to denounce anyone who did not vote Republican. Democrats were told to repent and then those who refused to see the error of their ways were asked to get out.

LEGALIZING CHURCHES IN POLITICS

Fundamentalist Baptists in Texas have jumped onto the political bandwagon.

The Texas Restoration Project is an attempt to enlist churches in the political process [i.e. Republican Party]. Their leader is a player in this Restoration movement. The group's newsletter endorses candidates in backhanded ways. It advocates a bill before Congress to allow churches to directly participate in partisan politics.

Not only would the bill before the House allow pastors to endorse candidates in church, it would also allow church budgets to be used in political campaigns.

When Southern Baptists leader Richard Land drove his Vote Values Bus around the nation it was an under-the-table way to accomplish similar results. Land is now trying to be a key kingmaker in the drive to select a GOP presidential contender.

From Rick Warren on the West Coast to Ronnie Floyd in Arkansas to James Kennedy in Florida, pastors have gone on the airways in the name of the Gospel and advised listeners who to vote for.

No matter their politics, believers should not allow a sacred hour to be commandeered in the quest for secular power.

- The author is pastor of First Baptist Church of Onalaska, TX

The resolution that was ultimately adopted, "On Pastors, Culture, and Civic Duty," did not mention partisanship. Instead, it suggested pastors only speak out on burning moral issues and promote informed and active Christian citizenship.

DON'T ABANDON POLITICAL ACTIVITY

"The worst thing that can happen is for people of faith to say, 'You know, that's really not our arena, we're just going to abandon it to the secularists,'" said the Rev. Jerry Sutton of Nashville, TN, whose church hosted the second Justice Sunday assembly.

Southern Baptists have been solidly Republican since the emergence of the anti-abortion movement, the denomination's "conservative resurgence" of the late 1970s and divorcee Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. There is no indication of that wavering.

"There is a long history of dissent among Southern Baptists, so the discordant voices about politics are not necessarily a harbinger of change," said John Green of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

What might surprise some evangelicals is that a prominent pastor, Frank Page of South Carolina, chatted over breakfast at a country club with Rudy Giuliani, former New York mayor vilified by social conservatives for supporting abortion rights and for his public adultery and three marriages.

Page said the two discussed everything from the Roman Catholic Mass to evangelical beliefs about accepting Christ.

He said he told Giuliani, "We like you as a person" but Page also described "an honest dialogue about abortion, about gay rights - and those are extreme differences."

Since aligning itself with the Republican Party, growth membership in the SBC is nearly zero. For many Baptists, as long as the GOP is anti-abortion, they will stay with the party despite its actions in other public realms.

Something To Think About

The next time you feel like God cannot use you, just remember:

Noah was a drunk ... Abraham was too old ... Isaac was a daydreamer ... Jacob was a liar ... Leah was ugly ... Joseph was abused ... Moses had a stuttering problem ... Gideon was afraid ... Samson had long hair and was a womanizer ... Rahab was a prostitute ... Jeremiah and Timothy were too young ... David had an affair and was a murderer ... Elijah was suicidal ... Isaiah preached naked ... Jonah ran from God ... Naomi was a widow ... Job went bankrupt ... Peter denied Christ ... The Disciples fell asleep while praying ... Martha worried about everything ... The Samaritan woman was divorced more than once ... Zaccheus was too small ... Paul was too religious ... Timothy had an ulcer ... and Lazarus was dead!

- Ephiphany Newsletter

G.W. Bush Opposes Press Shield Law

By Zachary Coile

The Bush Administration, which opposes legislation to shield journalists from revealing their confidential sources, warned Congress that a pending bill's broad definition of journalists could protect the media wings of terrorist groups.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers, D-MI, challenged the Justice Department's claim, calling it "totally absurd."

Attorney Lee Levine, who has represented many reporters subpoenaed by the government, said shield laws in 33 states and court rulings in 16 others have helped establish who qualifies for a reporter's privilege. [Oklahoma has had a shield law in place for many years. So far no terrorists have emerged, although the editorial board of the Daily Disappointment may be suspect.]

ASSERTS HELP FOR TERRORISTS

At a Judiciary Committee hearing on the media shield bill, the administration made the assertion that terrorists would seek to evade prosecution by invoking a reporter's privilege in federal court.

The bill would protect reporters, in most cases, from having to disclose their confidential sources or turn over documents to federal prosecutors.

Although the effort to protect reporters stalled in the gap Congress last year, supporters said its prospects appear to be improving in the new Congress controlled by Democrats.

Rachael Brand, assistant attorney general in the office of legal policy, said criminals might post documents or video on Web sites, then invoke the new protections for journalists in an effort to thwart prosecutors. The groups could include "media components of terrorist organizations," she said.

ADMINISTRATION'S CLAIM TERMED OUTLANDISH

Sponsors of the bill said the administration's claim is outlandish. Many groups labeled by the State Department as terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Hezbollah, have Web operations based abroad. How could they take advantage of a U.S. shield law?

The House shield bill also contains exceptions that would allow federal prosecutors to seek information from journalists if it was needed to protect national security or to prevent imminent or actual harm.

"Ever since 9/11, they have used the incident to take things away from us ... We're supposed to be afraid of terrorists," Conyers said.

Your Airwaves Are Captives Of Flakes

All Americans own radio and TV airwaves but the Far Right dominates virtually all talk shows, from drug addict Rush Limbaugh to sexual harasser Bill O'Reilly.

The Center for American Progress and Free Press released the first-ever statistical analysis of the political make-up of talk radio in the United States. It confirms that talk radio, one of the most widely used media formats in America, is dominated almost exclusively by conservatives.

The new report, entitled *The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio*, raises serious questions about whether the companies licensed to broadcast over the public radio airwaves are serving the listening needs of all Americans.

Progressive talk is making few inroads on commercial stations - rightwing talk reigns supreme on America's airwaves. Some key findings:

In the spring of 2007, of the 257 news talk stations owned by the top five commercial station owners, 91% of the total weekday talk radio programming was conservative, and only 9% was progressive.

COMPARE THE HOURS

Each weekday, 2,570 hours and 15 minutes of conservative talk are broadcast on these stations compared to 254 hours of progressive talk - 10 times as much conservative talk as progressive talk.

A whopping 76% of the news/talk programming in the Top 10 radio markets is conservative, while 24% is progressive.

Two common myths are frequently offered to explain the imbalance of talk

Corporate Titans Running Agencies

When Michael Baroody of the National Association of Manufacturers [NAM] withdrew his nomination to run the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Democrats cheered that a fox had been barred from the henhouse.

But, they sighed, President George W. Bush has otherwise succeeded in turning government over to corporate titans.

But Baroody is no businessman. He's a business lobbyist. The distinction is crucial to understanding an administration in which energy lobbyists oversee mining and drilling, timber lobbyists oversee logging and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association has practically moved to the Department of Agriculture.

These are Washington people, not corporate people. They make legislation, not payroll. They're insider hens who side with foxes and know the henhouse well.

The capitalist ideal is free markets and level playing fields; the lobbyist ideal is influencing the levers of power to help clients. In 2004 the Denver Post found 100 Bush appointees regulating industries they used to represent as lobbyists or lawyers.

That didn't include former quasi-lobbyists like Vice President Dick Cheney, who became a CEO because Halliburton wanted government contracts.



"I mean, who would believe that Hamas would be allowed in federal court to claim that they had the use of the shield to protect them? It's totally absurd and without any basis whatsoever."

The hearing was dominated by the presence of veteran New York Times columnist William Safire, former speech writer for President Richard Nixon.

CONSERVATIVE COLUMNIST SUPPORTS SHIELD LAW

Safire said the Justice Department, federal prosecutors and judges were coercing journalists to reveal their sources, with subpoenas, fines and the threat of jail time, at an unprecedented rate.

"The movement to force journalists to reveal their sources is an attempt to turn the press into an arm of the law," Safire said. "Believe me, when a journalist is threatened with jail ... he or she feels a coercive chill."

Rep. Mike Pence, R-IN, a former conservative talk show host and a chief sponsor of the bill, warned that prosecutors' efforts to force reporters to name their sources was scaring government whistle-blowers from coming forward.

"We face the real danger that there may never be another 'Deep Throat,'" Pence said, referring to Mark Felt, the former FBI official who was the Washington Post's key source in exposing the illegal activities of the Nixon administration.

The courts haven't had a whole lot of difficulty figuring out who is really engaged in something that looks and smells like journalism, as opposed to people who are using it as a scam.

© San Francisco Chronicle

radio:

- 1) The 1987 repeal of the Fairness Doctrine [which required broadcasters to devote airtime to contrasting views]; and
- 2) Simple consumer demand.

Both of these fail to adequately explain the root cause of the problem.

Our conclusion is that the gap between conservative and progressive talk radio is the result of multiple structural problems in the U.S. regulatory system.

BREAKDOWN OF TRUSTEE CONCEPT

This is particularly true in the complete breakdown of the public trustee concept of broadcasting, the elimination of clear public interest requirements for broadcasting, and the relaxation of ownership rules including the requirement of local participation in management.

Ultimately, these results suggest that increasing ownership diversity, both in terms of the race/ethnicity and gender of owners, as well as the number of independent local owners, will lead to more diverse programming, more choices for listeners, and more owners who are responsive to their local communities and serve the public interest.

Along with other ideas, the report recommends that national radio ownership not be allowed to exceed 5% of the total number of AM and FM broadcast stations, and local ownership should not exceed more than 10% of the total commercial radio stations in a given market.

© ThinkProgress.org

The result is not just the oil lobbyist caught editing science out of climate reports, or the energy lobbyist convicted in the Abramoff scandal. It's the scandal-free corporate welfare, tax breaks and other Big Government goodies for industry.

Baroody is a policy wonk whose father founded a think tank. But he's been working the Washington henhouse since 1970, and he has fought to shield manufacturers from claims and fines.

Giving a NAM lobbyist power over consumer safety would have been like giving a child power over bedtime. It's only a problem if you expect enforcement.

Quote Of The Week

"What is the mission of American public education? As a nation, are we still committed to educating students to be both workers and citizens, as we have long proclaimed? Or have we lost sight of the latter goal of encouraging students to be contributing members of a democratic society? What might schools look like if citizenship mattered as much as reading and math?" - Teacher John L. Puckett

Women Trashing Hillary Candidacy

By Lakshmi Chaudhry

Many of the very same feminists who were Hillary Clinton's most ardent supporters as First Lady are now fiercely opposed to her historic bid to become the first female President

The woman once described by Susan Faludi as a symbol of "the joy of female independence" now evokes ambivalence, disdain and, sometimes, outright vitriol.

The rightwing's favorite "femi-nazi" now has to contend with Jane Fonda comparing her to "a ventriloquist for the patriarchy with a skirt and a vagina."

This from a woman who sat in a North Korean anti-aircraft gun, simulating shooting down American aircraft.

So what's up with the Hillary bashing?

CLINTON HAS A WOMAN PROBLEM

In her Newsweek column, Anna Quindlen declared, "The truth is that Sen. Clinton has a woman problem."

Not exactly true, as it turns out. Hillary Clinton was the No. 1 choice of 42% of likely Democratic primary women voters in a recent Zogby survey, compared with 19% for Barack Obama and 15% for John Edwards.

Her favorable rating among independent women is a whopping 21 points higher than among independent men.

Let's be clear: Hillary has a "feminist problem," and more so with those who lean liberal.

At first glance, the fault line dividing feminists in their view of Hillary Clinton is merely a matter of ideology. On one side are the mainstream moderate women's organizations such as NOW and EMILY's List, facing off against more radical progressive feminists, especially those opposed to the Iraq War.

Some of her supporters claim that much of the anger is inspired by her now infamous 2002 Congressional vote.

WHAT ABOUT HER WHOLE BODY OF WORK?

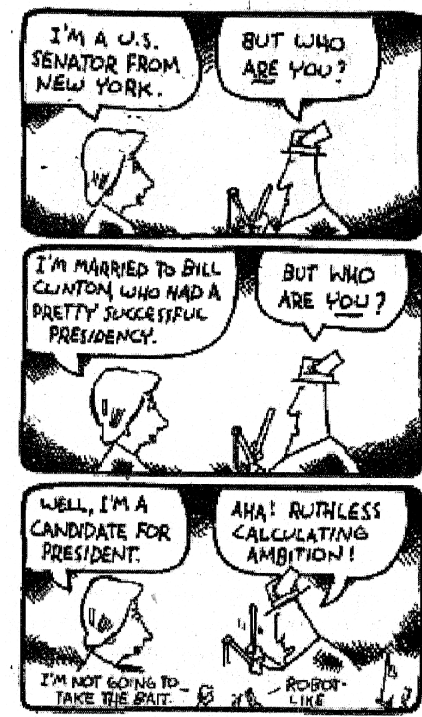
"It's about this one vote, which was not to invade Iraq but to authorize the President to wage war. I can't understand how this can be held up against a lifetime of important political work," says NOW president Kim Gandy.

Antiwar sentiments run high indeed, but when it comes to feminism and feminists, the "Hillary divide" also mirrors a deeper debate over the relationship between gender and political power.

The ambivalence over Hillary's candidacy has just as much to do with increasing skepticism about the value of making it to the top.

Simply breaking the glass ceiling, once a cherished goal of all feminists, has lost much of its appeal, especially after seven years of the Bush Administration.

Over the course of his presidency, George W. Bush has appointed women to some of the most prominent positions in his Administration - all the while work-



ing to undermine women's rights across the board.

FIERCE ASSAULT ON REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

So it is that we witnessed a fierce assault on women's reproductive rights even as flip-flopper Condoleezza Rice became the first African-American woman to make Secretary of State.

Feminist principles may be better served by electing a truly liberal candidate who will move us further toward a more progressive and therefore more equitable future, according to some feminists. But how electable would that woman be?

To be fair, the women and the organizations supporting Hillary are hardly advocating a "vagina litmus test."

NOW has supported male candidates in the past and is now backing Clinton because of her demonstrated history.

Clinton's supporters argue that women candidates are unfairly subjected to higher standards, especially by women themselves.

When it comes to presidential politics, this double standard also works in subtler ways. "There's not one man of either party who is at the top of the race right now who, if he were a woman, would be taken seriously," says White House Project's Marie W. Wilson.

IF ONLY SHE WERE HARRY RODHAM

Susan Estrich wrote in her 2005 book, *The Case for Hillary Clinton*: "Imagine if Hillary weren't a woman. She'd simply be the best-qualified candidate, with absolutely everything going for her ... If she were a he - Harry Rodham - the Democratic party would be thrilled."

Most feminists recognize that the chance of a true-blue liberal becoming the first female President is about as likely as that of the proverbial snowball's.

See TRASHING Page 16

Republicans Haven't Laid Glove On Hillary

By Susan Estrich

Obviously, I won't be voting in the Republican primary, so I watched the debates between the 10 contenders from a decidedly different perspective.

Could any of them beat my friend and the Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton?

And the good news, for me anyway, is that given what they've had to say about the Clintons, they're using ammunition that's more than a decade old - the equivalent of a lifetime in politics. Shooting with old blanks, you might say. Is this the best they can do?

The question was a giveaway: Would it be good for America to have Bill Clinton back living in the White House?

MITT WHIFS AT SOFT-BALL

"You've got to be kidding," responded Mitt Romney, who has less of a chance of living in the White House, as things now stand, than the Clintons do.

"No, I'm not," the moderator responded. "His wife's running, haven't you heard?"

It was an invitation to unload on Hillary.

And here's the amazing part: The men on that stage had nothing to say. They sounded like a bunch of guys carping about ancient history.

According to Sen. [Sam] Brownback, the problem with Hillary is that she didn't stand up for marriage. Come again? You mean, because she stayed with her husband, notwithstanding their troubles, unlike Republican frontrunners Rudy Giuliani [on his third marriage, after publicly trashing his second wife and taking his kids to court because they didn't want to stay overnight with him and his then-girlfriend] and John McCain [who had a public affair before marrying his second wife]?

HILLARY IS 'FAMILY VALUES' CANDIDATE

In this crowd, Hillary Clinton is the "family values" candidate. At least her daughter will be campaigning for her, which is more than you can say about Rudy's kids.

Sen. Brownback's answer wasn't much better. "No," he said, because "where you have been is where you're going to go. And Hillary Clinton tried to socialize medicine in this country - a very bad idea."

Remember Hillary Healthcare? Actually, many people don't. It's been almost 15

years. And many of those who do remember it now understand they would have been better off under Hillary's plan than they are now.

As for going back to the 1990s, if you can remember it, you'll remember how much better things were in the country, and how much more respected we were in the world. In the '90s, there was peace in the world, and a strong and growing economy at home. And budget surpluses.

If it hadn't been for the Republicans making a federal case of Monica Lewinsky, we might have accomplished even more. Compared to George Bush's mistakes, Bill Clinton was a model of perfection.

HUCKABEE'S LAME RESPONSE

It gets worse, or better, depending on your perspective. Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who claimed to know the Clintons better than anyone else on the stage, couldn't come up with a single, specific reason why Hillary shouldn't be president, other than to say it "was probably not a good idea to put either of them back in the White House."

"Probably not a good idea"? This is what you call sharp criticism from the man who knows them best?

McCain's answer was no more persuasive. "Most importantly," he said, "it would mean that the appointment of Supreme Court justices and other judges would be - take a very sharp turn to the left. ... I'm proud that we have Justices Alito and Roberts on the United States Supreme Court. I'm very proud to have played a very small role in making that happen."

How weak is that? First of all, the Supreme Court, for better or worse, has never been a voting issue in any recent presidential elections. Second of all, if it were, there seems little question that most Americans are closer in their outlook to the moderates appointed by President Clinton in an era when the Justice Department was not politicized the way it is now than they are to the Bush/Republican approach to justice, which sees loyalty to the president as more important than commitment to the rule of law.

This is not going to be a good Republican issue in the next election.

Finally, former Mayor Rudy Giuliani took his turn at bat-bashing the Clintons. And what did he come up with? "It would mean that we were back on defense

See LAME Page 16

NCLB Recruiting

Law Gives Military Student Data Access

By David Goldstein

It began as a class assignment for Alexia Welch and Sarah Ybarra: Make a five-minute video news story about advertising in public schools.

But the Lawrence, KS, teenagers' project snowballed into a 25-minute documentary on how the federal No Child Left Behind law to improve education promotes military recruitment, infringes on students' privacy and encourages school officials to look the other way.

The movie's fans include a Democratic California congressman who's been trying to change the law for two years and award winning filmmaker Robert Greenwald, who viewed some early rushes and offered the pair his lawyer's services, just in case.

NO CHILD LEFT UNRECRUITED

Their film, "No Child Left Unrecruited," premiered in April at an arts center in Lawrence, the home of the University of Kansas. A short trailer on YouTube has gotten 630 hits in the past month, and the film made its Washington debut last week.

"We found out this wasn't a school assignment anymore," said 17-year-old Ybarra, who'll be a senior this fall at Lawrence High School. "This was going to go beyond the walls of the district."

So there they were, the two teenagers from Jeff Kuhr's broadcast media class, at a screening in the basement of the Capitol, hosted by their congressional patron, Rep. Michael Honda.

"You get an A plus," said Honda, who was a schoolteacher and principal before he came to Washington.

THEY WANTED QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Eighteen-year-old Welch, who just graduated, said she and Ybarra just wanted to answer questions about the rules surrounding military-recruiting policies. They didn't anticipate the fuss.

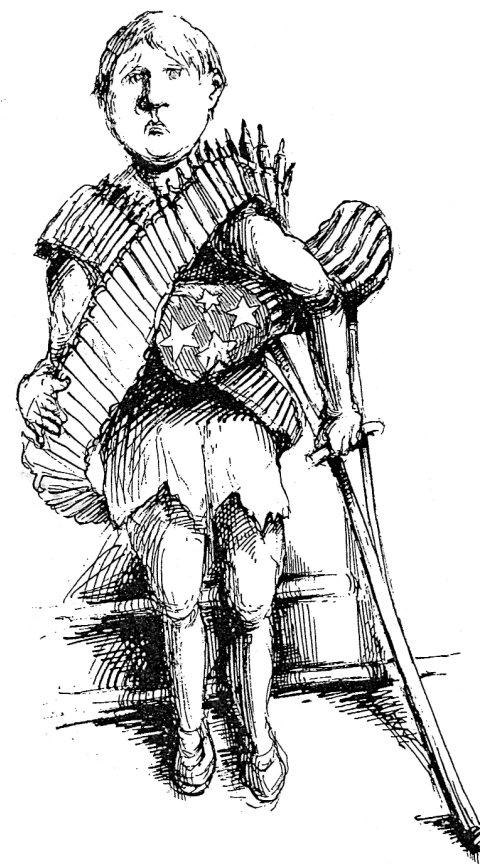
"All this other stuff blew us away," she said. "I don't think we ever thought about a Washington screening."

The idea came to Welch last summer when a contract Army recruiter wrote and offered her \$100 if she'd enlist. She wondered how he'd obtained her name, address and telephone number.

They discovered that a little-known provision of No Child Left Behind, which President Bush signed in 2002, requires schools to give the military personal information about their students. Otherwise, the schools' federal aid could be at risk.

ALL THAT DATA AVAILABLE FOR \$2

Welch and Ybarra found that their high school published all that information and more – age, gender, date of birth and parents' work phone numbers – in the high school directory, which anyone can buy for \$2.



Students could opt out of the directory, they learned, but few knew that they could. And the consequences of that would be not seeing their names listed in the yearbook or school newspaper or on the honor rolls.

The film follows Welch and Ybarra's odyssey "down the rabbit hole" as they question school officials about the ease with which the military can breach student privacy, and the roadblocks that face parents who seek to keep the data out of reach.

CONGRESSMAN PUSHING NCLB AMENDMENT

Welch and Ybarra contacted Honda after an Internet search showed that he's been trying to amend No Child Left Behind so that military recruiters couldn't get access to the information without parental consent.

The law is up for renewal this year. Honda's bill has 57 co-sponsors.

Welch and Ybarra said their film wasn't about the military's right to recruit students – which Welch said she had no problem with – but more about "making sure no question is left unanswered," Ybarra said.

Welch said she'd probably enroll at the University of Kansas next fall and might study journalism. Ybarra has another year of high school but has become passionate about documentaries.

For now, everyone involved is just enjoying the ride.

"This has been an amazing opportunity for all of us," said Kuhr, who accompanied the pair to Washington. "I mean, we're in the basement of the Capitol. Pretty cool."

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More Bush Corruption

Program's Creator Hired To Assess It

The corrupt government contractor who set up a billion-dollar-a-year federal reading program for the U.S. Department of Education has been exposed.

The department's Inspector General found that RMC Research Corp., one of the companies now evaluating the program, actually was supposed to keep it free of conflicts of interest.

"It's a classic case of the fox guarding the chicken coop," said Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-MA, who chairs the Senate Education Committee.

Reading First, part of President Bush's signature No Child Left Behind education law, provides intense reading help to low income children in the early elementary grades. Early studies show it is a failure.

RMC was hired to establish and implement the program starting in 2002 under three contracts worth about \$40 million.

Recently, the Education Department's inspector general reported that RMC failed to keep the program free of conflicts of interest.

For example, RMC did not screen subcontractors for relationships with publishers of reading programs, including a Bush relative.

Reading First is now in the midst of a congressionally mandated evaluation under a 2003 contract with a team that includes RMC, based in Portsmouth, NH.

Lawmakers who have been investigating the Reading First program criticized the connection.

"If it's true that RMC was also hired to evaluate the effectiveness of the very program it was hired to help implement, then the conflict of interest could not be any clearer," said Rep. George Miller, D-CA, chairman of the House Education Committee.

The inspector general found that federal officials intervened to influence state and local decisions about reading programs, a violation of the law.

RMC did not return calls seeking comment. Nor did Abt Associates, a contractor based in Cambridge, MA, that hired RMC as a subcontractor.

TRASHING

From Page 15

This year Hillary Clinton's presidential bid is becoming a lightning rod for a debate within feminism, and over its goals. What do we liberated women want: to join the clubhouse or burn it down?

Women are especially hard on Hillary because she's such a Rorschach and women want her to be exactly like them, whatever they are.

The Swift Boat liars who went after John Kerry, falsely denying his combat record, are organizing a campaign against Clinton.

How ironic that Clinton's critics are mouthing the same criticism as Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly who have demeaned and mocked her since her ascendancy to the U.S. Senate.

© Truthout

LAME

From Page 15

against terrorism, given Sen. Clinton's recent positions. ... When you had this debate last week and all the Democrats were up here, I never remember the words 'Islamic fundamentalist terrorism' being spoken by any of them. And I heard it a lot tonight."

Republicans use tougher words than some Democrats. And excuse me if I'm wrong, but it was under George Bush's watch that we were attacked by terrorists, after the president ignored warning of the danger of precisely the sort of attack we faced. And it was the Republicans who got us into a war that has not only cost thousands of Americans their lives [not to mention \$500-plus billion], but resulted in the growth of a fundamentalist insurgency and anti-American feeling.

Are we safer than we were four years ago? None of the Republicans wanted to talk about that. Has George Bush been a better president than Bill Clinton? Not according to the majority of Americans, whose disapproval of the current president is breaking records.

One of the biggest concerns you hear from Democrats about Hillary Clinton is the fear of the Republican attacks on her, and how they might affect her electability. Judging from how the Republican contenders handled the Clinton question in their first debates, Democrats don't have much to worry about.

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NCLB Commission Elitist And Wrong

By Livia Gershon

Later this year, Congress will consider reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB]. When it does, the chairs of the House and Senate education committees have said that their evaluation of the program will be guided by a report released recently by the Commission on No Child Left Behind.

It is a group that evaluated the law's effects over the past year. But critics say that in creating its report, *Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the Promise to Our Nation's Children*, the commission ignored the perspectives of students as well as parents and educators who see problems with the law.

The controversial No Child Left Behind Act is the keystone of the Bush Administration's education policy. Supporters argue that it is a tool for improving education and moving toward educational equality for students of all racial and economic backgrounds.

NCLB IS TESTING, TESTING, TESTING

The law requires schools to meet certain goals each year, based largely on students' scores on tests like the ACT. Those schools that do not do so must take specifically mandated steps that may involve providing tutors, replacing school staff, restructuring or even privatizing the school.

Educators, students and parents who oppose the law argue that it is too reliant on standardized tests and too punitive.

Egad! The report recommends creating a more uniform national standard for the tests required by law, adding a new 12th-grade test.

"If anything, their recommendations would intensify the role of testing," said Robert Schaeffer, the public education director of the National Center for Fair & Open Testing [FairTest], a nonprofit group that promotes changes in the use of standardized testing. "It's more of the same bad thing."

LAUNCHED WITH PRIVATE FUNDING

The commission was launched with financial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and six other private foundations. None of the commission members were presently public school teachers or administrators. Its 13 members are mostly academics.

In the course of its study of the law, the commission held a series of hearings across the country, where they heard almost exclusively from high-level education, government, union and business leaders.

Schaeffer argues that the Commission's conclusions are not surprising, given the way the body was formed.

"It was a very elitist operation in which they spent very little time talking to actual practitioners, the people on the ground dealing with the effects of No Child Left Behind every day," he said.

THEY DIDN'T SEEK THE TRUTH

Still, Jennifer Adams, the commission's communications director, acknowledged that commissioners primarily sought suggestions on how to reach the law's stated goals, rather than questioning No Child Left Behind's overall framework.

In particular, the report does not question the value of standardized tests, probably the most-widely criticized of NCLB's features.

Critics say emphasizing standardized tests encourages teachers to focus on skills that are ultimately not very useful to students.

50 Million Acres Of Forests Lost

Buried in the final communique issued at the recent Group of 8 summit in Germany was an important and overdue pledge to help poorer nations reduce the global warming emissions caused by the slashing and burning of their tropical forests.

One of the glaring weaknesses in the 1997 Kyoto Accord, which the Bush Administration has repudiated, was its failure to address deforestation, which now amounts to an astonishing 50 million acres a year.

Regrettably, the United States is headed in the opposite direction.

President Bush's foreign aid budget proposes a one-third cut in funding for the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. Comparable cuts are targeted for a program that helps Madagascar's struggling population protect its tropical forests.

This is embarrassing, to say the least. As the world's richest nation – and also the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases – the United States should be leading this parade, not bringing up the rear.

Because it releases huge quantities of carbon stored in trees, deforestation contributes at least 20% of all carbon emissions, quite apart from the toll it takes on plant and animal life and biodiversity generally. That's more carbon dioxide than all of the world's cars and trucks produce.

A collective effort to bring deforestation under control, and to plant new trees in areas already laid bare by the chain saw, could substantially reduce these emissions. It would also provide developing countries with outside revenue and draw them into the broader fight against climate change.

The industrialized world now needs to follow up its pledge with hard cash.

Several big environmental organizations – including Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund – have already embarked on privately funded efforts to protect forest land.

There is no substitute for collective government action, and on this score other rich nations are well ahead of the United States.

Australia recently announced a commitment of \$200 million to forest preservation efforts worldwide. The Europeans have agreed to put \$150 million into



"The tests are supposed to measure how good you would do in college, and I don't see how," said Jevon Cochran, a senior at Detroit's Lewis Class Technical High School and a member of By Any Means Necessary [BAMN], a civil rights coalition that works to defend affirmative action and immigrant rights.

"For instance ... [in a lesson] on the English section of the test, there was this whole section on where you have to place semicolons in sentences. I don't see how learning about where you place semicolons is going to help you better prepare yourself for college."

LEARN TO THINK NOT JUST TAKE TESTS

Cochran said he would like to see his classes focus more on developing critical thinking skills and helping individual students figure out what learning techniques work best for them.

Christopher Sutton, a senior at Murray Wright High School in Detroit, said he notices teachers becoming dispirited and showing less creativity in their teaching when they are preparing students for a standardized test.

"It's like, 'OK, you all know what this is, you already know what we're preparing for, it's boring, I know, I'm sorry, but I have to go over this information because it's mandated by the district.'"

Another flaw critics see in the report is that its discussion of funding is almost completely limited to making recommendations on how to spend money that is already allocated for education.

IT IS A HUGE UNFUNDED MANDATE

Caprice Taylor-Mendez, director of the Boston Parents Organizing Network [BPON], an advocacy group for parents of Boston public-school students, said that even if test-based evaluations could determine which schools are having trouble, what is really needed is more funding to address the problems. It is largely an unfunded mandate.

"What does assessment do but flag problem areas?" she said. "Then where is the support?"

Lucia Santana, an organizer with BPON and parent of six children who have gone through the Boston school system, said her children felt "traumatized" when they were required to take the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests.

She said they did not feel their school had prepared them adequately for the high-stakes exams, and that schools must reduce their class sizes to teach students effectively.

"If we continue with No Child Left Behind," she said, "I want to see more resources, more money for the schools."

© The New Standard

a World Bank facility aimed at strengthening the ability of poorer countries to manage forests and prevent illegal logging.

The governments that demonstrate management strengths are likely to attract foreign investors eager to satisfy their own obligations to reduce emissions by helping others do so.

© Truthout

Polish Divorce

A Polish man moved to the U.S. and married an American girl. Although his English was far from perfect, they got along very well until one day he rushed into a lawyer's office and asked him if he could arrange a divorce for him.

L: Have you any grounds?

P: Yes, an acre and half and nice little home.

L: No, I mean what is the foundation of this case?

P: It made of concrete.

L: I don't think you understand. Does either of you have a real grudge?

P: No, we have carport, and not need one.

L: I mean. What are your relations like?

P: All my relations still in Poland.

L: Is there any infidelity in your marriage?

P: We have hi-fidelity stereo and good DVD player.

L: Why do you want this divorce?

P: She going to kill me.

L: What makes you think that?

P: I got proof.

L: What kind of proof?

P: She going to poison me. She buy a bottle at drugstore and put on shelf in bathroom. I can read, and it say: "Polish Remover."

- Thanks to D.R. Sparks

'SiCKO' Film About Life, Death, Money

By Sari Gelzer

"The release of Michael Moore's "SiCKO" is one of the most important developments in the national debate on our healthcare crisis since the Clintons attempted to pass universal healthcare legislation in 1994." – Rep. John Conyers, D-MI

With its national debut, documentary filmmaker Michael Moore has been on the move with his new film "SiCKO." He is his own promotion department.

Moore began in New York with a screening to honor 9/11 first responders.

Then he showed his film to Congress and testified about healthcare, and later that day he had a showing for pharmaceutical and insurance lobbyists.

Moore went to New Hampshire to give a private screening to members of the California Nurses Association, and later he arrived in Chicago to rally around health care change in Millennium Park.

"SiCKO" focuses on the more than 250 million people who have insurance, but highlights those who are betrayed by it in their time of need.

THE LIE ABOUT INSURANCE COVERAGE

Moore's film shows the American healthcare system's dangerous focus on profits, exemplified in the stories of average Americans such as Donna, 52, and Larry Smith, 62.

They were forced to file bankruptcy as a result of her cancer and his heart problems. They had health insurance, but it hardly paid for everything.

Moore shows the American healthcare system through the lens of insurance company whistleblower Dr. Laure Peeno, who testified before Congress that she "denied a man a necessary operation and thus caused his death."

She went on to say that her actions were rewarded: "This secured my reputation and it ensured my continued advancement in the health care field."

And, finally, Moore puts the American healthcare system into perspective by traveling to hospitals in Canada, Britain, Cuba and France – countries which have government-run programs.

LAUGHING AT SERIOUS QUESTIONS

Scenes showed the expressions of doctors and patients who laughed or looked quizzical when Moore asked about the cost of visits to the doctor.

Moore's film contains humorous moments, such as his search in a London hospital for a billing department, only to find that the only place that deals with money is actually dispensing it to those patients who qualify for travel expenses. But the humor hardly covers up the starkness.

The horror of Moore's expose is not that health insurance companies are posting too much of a profit; it's that they are doing so at the expense of American lives.

Healthcare is a life and death issue, says Moore, and it should not be based on profit.

"We wouldn't expect the fire department to post a profit. We expect a free service for everyone, because it's a life and death issue," says Moore, citing a utility that serves everyone and is supported by public taxation.

HE DIDN'T INTERVIEW THE TARGETS

One voice missing from the film was that of health insurance and pharmaceutical company's CEOs.

Moore says that he didn't give the pharmaceutical companies any time in the film because, "they are on the evening news every night with about 1,000 ads." "SiCKO" exists as the balance to this inundation, says Moore.

Many critics are saying that Moore has achieved with "SiCKO" what he has not in past films: appeal to audience members across the political spectrum.

Fox News critic Roger Friedman says that the film is a "brilliant and uplifting new documentary."

Friedman goes on to say, "This time around, the controversial documentarian seems to be letting the subject matter do the talking, and in the process shows a new maturity."

Moore's film takes equal shots at politicians who have accepted money from healthcare lobbyists. He says that there are four healthcare lobbyists for every member of Congress.

HOW HE RATES THE CANDIDATES

Most notably, he includes a segment on Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who began a campaign for universal health care when she was First Lady, which did not succeed.

Currently, however, she is the second-highest recipient of campaign donations from the healthcare industry.

Harvey Weinstein, whose company financed the film, "begged" Moore to remove the footage that exposed Clinton's donations. But Moore says he had to "do the right thing" by including it.

Currently, Moore is holding politicians, especially presidential hopefuls, accountable in creating a healthcare plan, a move that is considered likely to shape the 2008 elections.

Moore said in regards to Democratic presidential hopefuls, both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton do not give specific enough healthcare plans.

John Edwards gives a specific healthcare plan, but Moore takes fault with it because private companies are not eliminated from the system.

DOCTORS AND NURSES ARE SUPPORTIVE

Moore's film release was accompanied by a coalition of doctors and nurses who are co-hosting premieres of "SiCKO" across the nation. Their campaign is



titled, "Scrubs for SiCKO."

They gained attention as they began their bus tour with the goal of recruiting enough registered nurses and doctors to attend every theater in the nation.

The nurses and doctors will be at the screenings to pass out literature on current healthcare campaigns, and will be urging the audience to help pass single-payer/Medicare-for-all-type legislation such as HR 676 and similar bills in several state legislatures.

After a two hour-film on the topic, Moore's health care proposal is a mere three sentences.

In what he terms his "Prescription for Change," his solution reads:

First, "Every American must have full, uninterrupted health care coverage for life;"

Second, "Private, for-profit health insurance companies must be abolished;"

And last, "Profits of pharmaceutical companies must be strictly regulated like [those of] a public utility."

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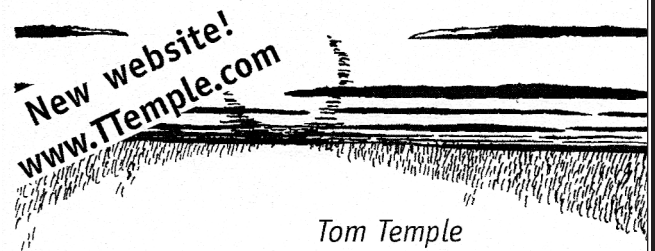
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