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State Dollars To Churches Ties That Bind

By Arnold Hamilton

No public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, donated, or used, directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit, or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion, or for the use, benefit or support of any priest, preacher, minister, or other religious teacher or dignitary, or sectarian institution as such. – Oklahoma Constitution, Section II-5

In late June, more than 50 religious leaders gathered for lunch in northwest Oklahoma City at the invitation of the state Department of Human Services and its Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

The event – “Intentional Influence 101” – was aimed at helping attendees “discover ways to maximize your resources to intentionally benefit Oklahoma’s disadvantaged and extend your influence in the community.”

They also were invited to “learn about Compassionate Ministry Centers and how your congregation can be involved in crucial ministry opportunities.”

Conspicuously absent: There were no Jewish leaders. No Muslims. No Buddhists. The event was evangelical Christian – with a capital E.

“With the prayers that were given, it was more like an evangelical prayer meeting than the prayers of First Christian Church,” said one of the attendees, the Rev. Jeff Hamilton, a former state legislator who now serves as associate minister at Oklahoma City’s First Christian Church.

“It was almost as if we were having a particular brand of Christianity jammed down our throats.”

The seemingly impenetrable wall that Oklahoma’s Constitution established to separate church and state is now remarkably permeable.

Federal and state taxpayer dollars are seeping faster than ever into the palms of church leaders who once would have considered a financial partnership with government unthinkable, fearing it could lead to a loss of religious freedoms or establishment of an official state religion.

With evangelicals proving a potent political force over the last 30 years, especially for Republicans, Oklahoma’s GOP leaders are setting their

hooks more deeply into the faith community. They are devising more options for tax dollars to fund do-good projects that traditionally were financed through the collection plate.

Most obvious example is this year’s Transformational Justice Act, the brainchild of Republican House Speaker Lance Cargill. HB 2101’s goal – encouraging programs that help reduce the state’s staggering 26.2% recidivism rate – is worthy.

But Cargill’s mechanism for achieving it – funneling state tax dollars through the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives into church groups that will do the work – sets off alarms.

For starters: How will groups qualify for state grants? What expertise must they have? Who is going to evaluate their success? Using what criteria?

Robin Jones, director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, doesn’t know the answers, either.

“It’s still evolving,” she said. “Our office has started the process of asking the same questions you’re asking.”

This much we do know: For the first

time ever, state lawmakers – including most Democrats – approved state funding for the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in order to launch Cargill’s project. Previously, the seven-year-old, DHS-based office operated on, and administered, federal funds. The 2007 Legislature, though, committed at least \$100,000 to the office for the so-called “prison re-entry program.”

And it’s clearly only the beginning. The legislation, signed by Gov. Brad Henry, establishes a permanent revolving fund for the program – meaning a mechanism is now rooted in Oklahoma law to ensure the unimpeded flow of state tax dollars directly to religious groups.

The fact that the project is so vaguely defined and that it steers taxpayer money to church groups is especially worrisome to those who believe strongly in the separation of church and state. A court challenge seems likely.

Moreover, two Democratic lawmakers, Rep. Wallace Collins of Norman and Rep. Al Lindley of OKC, already have requested – or are in the process of requesting – attorney general’s

opinions on the constitutionality of the act that is scheduled to take effect Nov. 1.

Collins expressed concern inmates could be exposed to overt proselytizing or left with the unmistakable impression that “if I don’t go along with this deal, then I might not get my parole.”

“I can’t believe it’s just going to be an attempt to educate these prisoners that are about to be released,” said Collins, who fears only the most “aggressive, strong-willed” proselytizers will seek to establish ministries to inmates returning to society.

Lindley also wants to know if it interferes with powers already given to the Board of Corrections.

There is a brazen political component to Cargill’s plan, as well. Cargill demurs when asked if he is interested in higher office. But his actions speak of considerable ambition.

His 100 Ideas campaign enables him to raise money and elevate his statewide profile in the most political non-political way. And his Transformational Justice Act – if it passes constitutional muster – is a near-perfect vehicle to secure the loyalty of a ready-made campaign force crucial to GOP success: evangelical, faith-based, religious groups and churches.

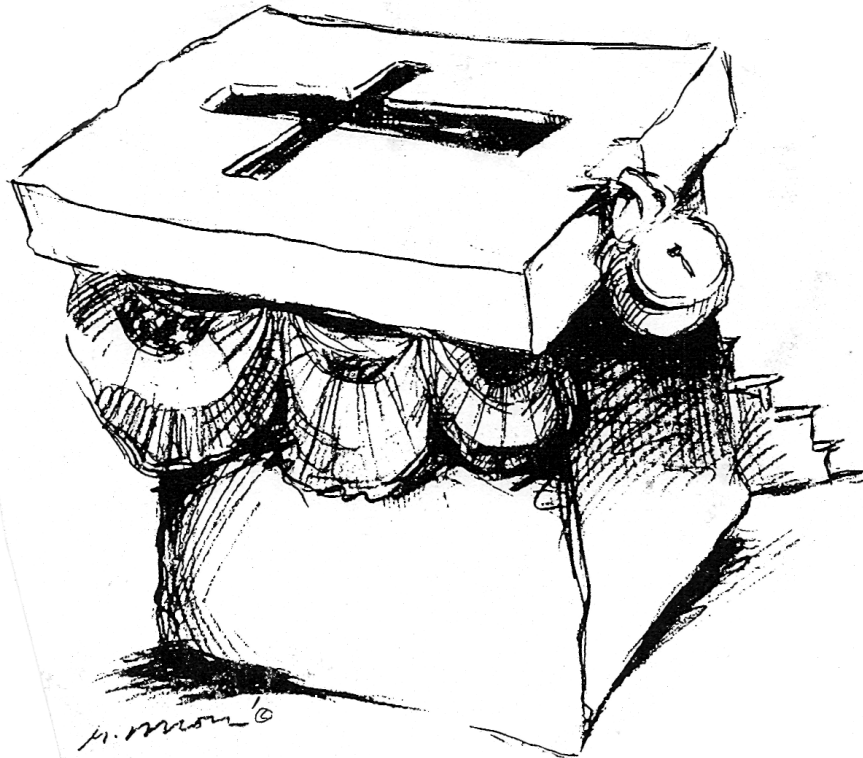
Was it an accident that no Jews, Muslims or Buddhists attended the June 26 luncheon, held at the home of “Reaching Our City,” a group with deep Nazarene roots? Or that only Christian prayers were offered during the event?

Jones, the director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, said the department is inclusive, not exclusive – and that luncheon invitations were sent to religious groups of all stripes.

[The United Way of Central Oklahoma was identified in the invitation as a co-sponsor, but no one representing the agency spoke at the luncheon.]

“It was a totally broad-based invitation,” she said. “We went out of our way to make sure they [other faiths] were on the list. We’re open to anything.”

“It’s very clear this office is an interfaith office, not a Christian office.” Time will tell. Stay tuned.



Observations

They Did What?

The next time you hear some Republicans brag about their takeover of the Legislature, ask them why their budget did not include adequate funding for the Oklahoma Ethics Commission.

Each year this vital agency gets less money to do its job of policing the ethics of Oklahoma's state elected officials. Why? Because neither Republicans nor Democrats want them to succeed. If they tell you otherwise, watch their noses grow.

The Commission received a budget of \$517,000 after asking for a minimum of \$757,000 just to eke through its mission. Last year's budget was \$505,000, which means they didn't get enough even to cover inflation.

They received \$56,000 for office operating expenses compared to \$80,000 the previous year. The Commission has a single investigator to cover the entire state.

"It's a pattern we can no longer tolerate," said John Raley, a member of the commission.

GOP Speaker Lance Cargill and Co-Senate Leaders Glenn Coffee and Mike Morgan are constantly bragging about their wonderful bipartisan work in the '07 session.

That is bipartisan B.S.

Trail Boss

Burns Hargis' resignation as an Oklahoma State University regent can mean only one thing: He's a lock to be OSU's next president.

Of course, it can't happen officially until next year. State law prevents the Board of Regents from hiring a former member as university chief for at least a year after the regent's resignation or term has expired.

But make no mistake: Hargis has been anointed as the next Head Cowboy. He wouldn't have walked away from serving his alma mater for anything less.

We've fired more than a few darts at Hargis over the years, most often because of the right-wing pap he regur-

gitates on KFOR-TV's Flashpoint. He is Beavis to Democrat Mike Turpen's Butthead.

We know Show Biz when we see it. Hargis plays the role of the poor man's Rush Limbaugh with a semi-straight face. The real Hargis – historically, at least – is a moderate Republican, far more Rockefeller than [Pat] Robertson.

He's helped raise funds for Legal Aid, the only recourse for the poor. And he was featured guest [along with Turpen] at last fall's fund-raising dinner for the Cimarron Alliance Foundation, a nonprofit political action group promoting gay and lesbian issues.

The glib, friendly Hargis would be a vast improvement over OSU's last president, the mercurial David Schmidly – especially if he hires a pro to lead the academic side. Hargis needs to focus on his strengths: Bolster campus morale, pump up alums and raise megabucks.

His first order of business: Give up the weekly TV show. As OSU's president, he has no business in a partisan political role.

Charles Nesbitt

One of the finest public officials it has been our pleasure to know was Charles Nesbitt, easily one of the best attorneys general in state history.

Many years ago we were tipped off that major oil companies were meeting in a motel room in Tulsa, rigging the state bids on road oil.

We broke the story and won all sorts of awards. We supposed it would end with a slap on their wrists since oil is dominant in Oklahoma politics.

Nesbitt immediately filed a lawsuit in federal court and won it hands down, costing the oil companies an arm and a leg.

When he subsequently ran for governor he produced a blueprint called 39 Steps To A Better Oklahoma. It was brilliant, but he had made too many corporate enemies and he lost the race.

He was then elected to the Corpo-



DOUG MARLETTE 1949-2007

ration Commission, fighting for honesty in utility ratemaking in one of the most political operations in state government.

The Nesbitts in government don't come along with much frequency – elected officials willing to sacrifice their careers in order to do the right thing.

Look at the cowardly Democrats who voted for yet another unwarranted tax cut this year, scared to death they would lose their offices.

Look at our pathetic congressional delegation, supporting the wild spending and tragically wrong war waged by the most incompetent President in American history.

Charles Nesbitt, dedicated public official, superb civic leader and all-around honest man, has gone to his eternal rest at 85. God rest his soul. And please God, send us more like him.

Fat City

Anybody surprised that Oklahoma City is the fast food capital of America?

According to CNN, Oklahoma City has consistently been home to more so-called "heavy users" of fast food than any other American city. Only one city has made the Top 10 list in the years 1999, 2003 and 2006 – Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma City also is ranked 15th in the latest survey of "America's Fat-test Cities" by Men's Fitness magazine.

If adults want to eat themselves to death, so be it. But Oklahoma children are among the most obese in America.

Talk about lousy parenting.

Unfair

A straight shooter with a big heart, Howard Hendrick took on the thankless job of state Department of Human Services director nine years ago.

He's admirably fulfilled his duties, often masterfully guiding an agency that is woefully underfunded and understaffed.

[Yes, it has an impressive-sounding \$560 million budget and 7,800 employees, but check out the caseload.

Oklahoma operates it on the cheap then complains bitterly about the agency when children or elderly die of abuse and neglect.]

Now Hendrick is victim of a nasty personal attack, the subject of an attorney general's investigation for allegedly failing to seek adequate medical treatment for his 13-year-old son, victim of a brush-burning accident at their lake house.

Hendrick did what any prudent, loving parent would do. He assessed the injuries and treated his son. He immediately consulted a doctor. But he didn't take his son to be examined until the next day – a judgment parents routinely make on everything from runny noses to sprained [or is it broken?] ankles.

Unfortunately for Hendrick, the incident gave someone a perfect opening for character assassination.

We don't always agree with Hendrick, a conservative Republican, but he is a fine public servant and an even finer human being.

We hope this personal nightmare doesn't discourage him from continuing his good work at DHS.

Correction

In our last issue, we carried an excellent article entitled "Depleted Uranium Is Attacked By Activists."

Subsequently, we were shocked and dismayed to learn the article was copied – almost word-for-word – from one published April 15 in the Daytona Beach News-Journal.

Moreover, the byline – Karl Swartz – apparently was crafted to deceive us and our readers into thinking the author was Karl WB Schwarz.

Karl WB Schwarz has written extensively on the subject of depleted uranium and his "nanotechnology company has developed a type of technology to address the clean up of the deadly substance." [See Schwarz's letter to the editor, page 4.]

The fraudulent article was submitted to us by a loyal, longtime subscriber who had no reason to doubt its authenticity because it came from a trusted source.

We apologize to the Daytona Beach News-Journal, Karl WB Schwarz and to our readers for any misunderstanding it may have created.

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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

If you want details on Intelligent Design [i.e., creationism] being taught in public schools, check out Johnny Rex Buckles' legalese in the fall issue of the Oklahoma Law Review.

Laurel: To Tulsa subscriber John Carwile, inducted into the Litigation Counsel of America, honorary society composed of less than one-half of one percent of American lawyers.

Despite more than 800 Oklahoma car crashes caused by talking on a cell phone [a 240% increase in five years], the Legislature passed a law prohibiting cities from limiting their use. Oklahoma has 2.1 million cell phone users.

Dart: To state Sen. Todd Lamb, R-Edmond, for his sentencing enhancement bill on sex crimes against children. He failed to file companion legislation to cover the additional cost of \$42 million by 2026. Typical Republican.

Pari-mutuel horse race gambling, approved by 58% of voters in 1982, has put \$85 million in state coffers. Horsemen say gaming laws saved Oklahoma's horse racing industry.

Laurel: To retiring state Supreme Court Justice Robert Lavender for superb service since his appointment in 1965.

If the GOP-dominated Legislature had given State Higher Regents the \$170 million increase they asked for, there would be no double-digit tuition increases.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, saying he would block legislation to allow the FDA to regulate tobacco. It killed 440,000 last year. More than 6.4 million children living today will die due to the habit taken up as teens. Coburn is an MD? He vowed to do no harm?

State and federal authorities across America are furious at an NRA-backed law that hampers the release of trace data on guns. Said one: "What we're doing is not gun control it's crime control." [Time 7.30.07]

Dart: To the spineless Regents for Higher Education, adopting the Legislature's totally unconstitutional earmarks of \$33.6 million for college projects. Community colleges got virtually zip.

Benedict XVI seems intent on returning the Catholic Church to the 17th Century - Latin mass and all. Now he claims the Church is "the only true path to salvation." Shame on him.

Laurel: To the state Supreme Court, ruling that prohibiting an injured worker from submitting his or her doctor's evaluation is unconstitutional. Selfish corporate types are naturally outraged.

Drop by the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, see restrooms under three inches of water. Gawk at the plastic covers on the computers to keep them dry. Did the 2007 Legislature address their plea for help? Naw, they cut taxes again.

Dart: To Oklahoma's lousy state leadership, once again making negative national news. Newsweek magazine's ranking of health care in the states lists Oklahoma tied with Mississippi for dead last.

The Feds, which won a lawsuit against the state, are growing impatient over the state's repeated failure to pay its \$35 million share for building Sardis Lake. The 2007 Legislature ignored the bill and cut taxes again.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry for his interim appointment of Ex-Speaker Larry Adair to the State Board of Education. He was blocked by Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson, R-OKC, because he doesn't endorse vouchers and unregulated charter schools.

Our dream was to give the Legislature an ACT Test because we assumed most of them could read. Obviously not. The Constitution says special projects must be in separate bills but they ignored it. OKC Attorney Jerry Fent is suing.



Dart: To the Legislature for an obvious breach of faith, leaving public education with a \$17.5 million shortfall. They ordered that lottery funds be included in the state aid formula.

Highway Patrol Trooper Shaun Vann stopped a van in Tulsa for a broken taillight. There were 17 illegal immigrants inside. Our new immigration law does not provide any funds for keeping such folk in already overcrowded city and county jails.

Laurel: To Norman Cooper, retiring after 26 years of work for public educators and students via the Oklahoma Education Association. He is taking over as executive director of the Retired Educators Association.

Oklahoma's personal income is up 1.7% over last year - well below the national average of 2.1%. That's because many Oklahoma employers pay some of the sorriest wages in America.

Dart: To what passes for legislative leadership, under-funding the State Medical Examiner's office to the point where bodies were stacking up. They came up with an emergency fix.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-OK, warns that more than a dozen Oklahoma counties may flunk higher ozone standards proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency. Inhofe favors breathing dirty air?

Laurel: To Joe Harwood, a member of the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Commission for questioning \$660,000 the Commission OK'd for four private [unaudited] operations. Republican pork.

Moore's Rep. Randy Terrill has been replaced as the worst publicity hog in the Legislature by Moore's Rep. Paul Wesselhoft who can't go a week without showing off. Be sure you have your shots before you walk up to him.

Dart: To ex-Democratic Govs. George Nigh and David Boren for appearing in a commercial for Republican Lance Cargill's race for governor - better known as his 100 Ideas masquerade.

Based on key decisions thus far, America may face the most reactionary U.S. Supreme Court majority in modern history. They have made a mockery of the First Amendment and campaign reform.

Laurel: To PBS for bringing back Bill Moyers, superbly addressing vital issues facing the country. He reports that wages adjusted for inflation have sunk to the 1974 purchasing level.

First it is the judge losing a \$54 million lawsuit over lost pants, now we have ex-Judge Craig Key of Chandler with a book defending his refusal to follow DHS recommendations to remove Kelsey Smith-Briggs, 2, from her home. She was subsequently murdered.

Dart: To Oklahoma Republicans who continually whine about the lottery. It's a done deal and no one is forced to play. It's \$75 million the schools otherwise would not have, given the sorry present Legislature.

She's done it again! For the second time, Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland has testified before a U.S. House subcommittee, exposing insurance companies for misleading and fraudulent sales of Medicare health plans to seniors.

Laurel: To Mrs. John Edwards for exposing Ann Coulter for what she is - a vicious liar and defamer. Coulter is now saying she wishes John Edwards "would be killed in a terrorist attack." Her fans are as sick as she is.

The Oklahoma Gazette had a fascinating item about Rudy Giuliani's speech at OSU. His speech cost \$100,000, plus traveling in a Gulfstream jet, five hotel rooms, no flashbulbs, no candid photos, no general members of the press allowed.

Dart: To state GOP Chairman Gary Jones for asking the governor to name a special prosecutor to probe phony campaign contributions. The governor told him to take a hike, it was already being probed.

Egad! We've fallen for two urban legends: Actor Denzel Washington didn't pay for a new building at Brooks Army Medical Center in San Antonio. And our July 4th tribute to America's patriots didn't pass the historical smell test, either.

Laurel: To ex-Oklahoma County Assessor Mike Means for challenging state Sen. Stuart Jolly for his op-ed in the Oklahoman pointing to an Oklahoma property tax loophole costing schools millions of dollars. Means pointed out it doesn't exist.

Our proofreading eyes failed us: Former AG Mike Turpen's name was misspelled in the last issue.

Dart: To ABC-TV, easily the worst of the networks, featuring Michael Medved proclaiming that TV addiction causes people to become gay and liberal. Quick! Someone slap him in a rubber room.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I find the drivel by J.D. Sparks "Polish Divorce" [July 10 issue] offensive.

Stereotype ridicule by lame comics of "stingy Scottsmen," "drunken Irishmen," "wily Jews," etc., and in this case "dumb Polacks," is disgusting and insulting to your readers. Such ethnic slurs have been passé for decades and never were funny.

Aren't there enough clowns in public office to merit your attention and space in the Observer?

Teri Shifrin
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Congresswoman Mary Fallin in a recent letter to me said, "We must fight the war on terror where the terrorists live to ensure we never fight the war on terror on American soil." She made similar statements during her campaign.

Having taught critical thinking at the university level, I recognized this statement as a propaganda device called the either/or fallacy.

Fallin's statement presents only two alternatives with a polarizing certainty. This tactic shuts down debate and suppresses any attempt to find a common ground. It is black-and-white thinking which ignores, for example, the possibility that terrorists live in the United States and could attack "here" while we are fighting "there." It ignores the possibility that we could use soft power instead of reckless force.

Our troops are now caught in the crossfire of a civil war in Iraq between Sunnis and Shiites. Which side, if either, harbors terrorists? How do we identify these terrorists?

We went after Saddam Hussein because we were told that he had weapons of mass destruction and participated in 9/11. We got him even though neither charge was true. Why are we still there?

We need decisive action based on critical thinking to solve our problems.

Mindless propaganda which suppresses questions like mine is not helpful.

Wanda Jo Stapleton
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the U.S. cannot win the war in Iraq using traditional military power. It is a political problem requiring dialogue and diplomacy; something that has been in short supply for a long time. As a growing number of members of Congress of both parties come

to terms with these facts, the U.S. will likely begin to redeploy troops in the foreseeable future.

My heart goes out to all of those who fought and died in the war and those whose lives have been forever changed because of it. The war has been a horrific nightmare from the very beginning. It is a war that should never have been fought.

The price of this war is not accurately reflected in the massive Pentagon budget or even in the cutbacks in health care, education, environmental conservation and other essential services that are currently taking place. The price of the war goes far beyond the profound loss experienced by the more than 3600 American families that have buried sons, daughters, husbands and wives. The price of this war exceeds U.S. isolation in the international community and the loss of U.S. prestige and respect from other nations. The price of this war exceeds the more than 180,000 fatalities among the Iraqi people. The time is right to stop and look at the true costs of this war. Failing to examine the full costs of the war is like writing lots of checks and never doing the subtraction to the account. Once this process is accomplished, we may wonder if it makes sense to do it again.

James Stovall
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I was surprised to find a laurel to Gov. Henry praising a shrinking state payroll. I thought it was common knowledge that the reason government payrolls have shrunk is that more and more positions are contracted to the likes of Fink or Funk or whatever his name is. Unless the objective is the enrich Fink, I can't see this as a laurel.

In light of the article, "Just The Facts," wouldn't the competent use of statistics have been to see what the corresponding increase or decrease of contacted state employees was during the period '94-'07?

Keep on given "em hell.

Ted Metscher
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Thank God for you and The Observer! There is still a common sense voice out there that we can read on a regular basis!

I think you and your readers would want to know about the passing of an incredible Oklahoman, Dr. Sarah Allison. As her obit includes, she was the first female psychologist to have her own practice in the state of Okla-



homa. She was an ardent supporter of women's right to choose. She, along with others, financially supported the young female attorney who represented Roe in Roe v. Wade. She actively supported the ERA and worked for its passage in Oklahoma, as well as other states. She was a vigilant leader against any legislation or other attempts to limit a woman's right to choose. Her legacy continues by those whom she mentored carrying on this most important work.

Sarah lived for many years in Tulsa. Sarah was my Uncle John McQueen's wife for 19 years before she died on February 7, 2007.

Patricia Simons
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

It has been brought to my attention that your newspaper ran an article about Depleted Uranium written by a Karl Swartz.

My name is Karl Schwarz [properly spelled] and I have written about DU extensively and my nanotechnology company has developed a type of technology to address the clean up of the deadly substance. We are also working on several medical applications to remove DU from the human body.

You can imagine how popular that is with George Bush, so we are putting our main plant in the EU and working with scientists from all over the world except the United States or UK. Those that have the most to hide regarding DU are not cooperative.

One of the people on my email update list saw the article and could tell it was not my writing style. However, I now hear that someone has responded to the article as if I did write it.

I have not written on DU for about eight months due to business matters I have had to attend to in Europe. However, what I have written is easily found on the Internet and has been run in print in Canada and U.S.

I am not sure who this person is who wrote the article you published but it is most certainly not me.

If this mistaken identity continues, or someone is trying to mislead and hiding their true identity, you should remedy the matter by clearly stating that I did not write the article in the Oklahoma Observer.

Karl WB Schwarz
Alpharetta, GA

Editor: The Observer:

Arnold Hamilton's enlightening perspective on the professionalism of State Auditor Jeff McMahan is deserved and instructive.

McMahan, a tailor-trained investigative examiner of government spending, deserves full credibility in his pursuit of waste, corruption and malfeasance.

Hamilton's insightful reporting was especially perceptive.

Policing operations of Oklahoma government is a specialized business that is not taught in schools. It is a demanding challenge made complex by layers of history nestled only in the locale, personalities and erratic funding.

McMahan knows the territory. Crooks fear McMahan.

McMahan's senseless critic, Gary Jones, is a moss-back, political hack with a demonstrated right-wing agenda of tearing down government.

An unindicted former county commissioner - no less - without a clue about what happens in the anarchy he champions. Voters disclaimed him at the polls.

On the other hand, McMahan was hand-picked by former State Auditor Cliff Scott. Scott was a career fiscal blood hound who rose to the top then handed his skills and credibility to McMahan.

Oklahoma taxpayers should adore both Scott and McMahan. Based on my nearly 50 years of various roles in and about government, I can testify that these two public servants saved billions; exposed scoundrels, and never blinked when under a spotlight.

That either Scott or McMahan conducted their lives perfectly would be a false claim. Only one human has lived the perfect life during the past 2,000 years.

Least perfect is odorous Gary Jones, the fallen county commissioner and Republican chairman who senselessly attacks McMahan.

If Jones cared about integrity and solid enforcement of public spending laws, he would embrace McMahan's professional skills, dedicated efforts and sterling results in office.

Joseph H. Carter
Monkey Island

Editor, The Observer:

Bill Moyers Journal on OETA [July 13] advanced the idea that Cheney and Bush should be impeached on Constitutional grounds. An informative show and one that indicates how widespread this call to action has become.

Whether or not one agrees, it presents food for thought and is well worth listening to.

Virginia Reynolds
Cheyenne

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Frosty's Notebook

Fabulist Cargill

When freshman Republican House Speaker Lance Cargill opens his mouth he invariably inserts a foot.

His latest gaffe came when he lied by indirection about funding for higher education. He didn't get away with it thanks to sharp reporting by the Oklahoman's Jennifer Mock and Susan Simpson.

Oklahoma's continuing increase in college tuition has reached epidemic proportions. It has been necessary because the Legislature does a lousy job of funding.

Thanks to mindless tax cuts [mainly for the wealthy] the Legislature's share of funding for higher education has slipped from 75% in 1980 to 50% today.

Rather than facing the truth, Cargill trotted out a whopper, claiming funding for higher education has tripled in the past 12 years from \$500 million to \$1.5 billion.

That's when reporters called his hand. He was falsely including the 2005 \$500 million bond issue and other collateral costs that had nothing to do with tuition.

Faced with the truth, he trotted out the usual Republican rant – Higher Regents should push for more cost-cutting efficiencies. In other words, the double-digit tuition hikes are not the Republicans' fault.

This is the same Cargill who pledged no further tax cuts this year – then adopted one. Total tax cuts of more than \$700 million in the past three years were supported by Democratic Gov. Brad Henry. His inability to say “no” is legendary.

This is the same Cargill who endorsed moving teachers to the regional salary average, then abandoned his pledged word – no more pay raises, only “merit pay.” [Our teachers are \$1,000 below the regional average.]

This is the same Cargill who pledged, upon taking the Speaker's post in 2006, that Democrats' bills would be given a fair hearing. In the 2007 session he ordered the killing of every Democratic bill in committee. So much for openness in government.

This Is A Welcome?

An open letter to John Q. Porter, Oklahoma City's new school superintendent:

You were welcomed to Oklahoma City by the editorial page of the local daily newspaper. It calls to mind a Trojan horse, Greeks bearing gifts, a wolf in sheep's clothing, etc.

Of course you will keep your counsel – more than one school chief has lost the job because the local daily went after them.

Just so you know, the Oklahoman [the Daily Disappointment] once was openly hostile to public education. When their circulation plummeted, they made a conscious effort to disguise their contempt.

They still promote vouchers and unregulated charter schools. They are bitterly anti-collective bargaining [not just for educators], and in the past they've been the most racist publication in the state.

When one of the publishers, the late Ed Gaylord, was ruling the roost, he stormed into the newsroom waving a copy of the paper and yelling, “Why do we have to carry this n-----'s picture on page one?”

As for funding, the paper has always campaigned for lower taxes and fumed about the money going to education – especially to administrators. [They never met an unfunded mandate they didn't like – especially the No Child Left Behind law.]

You will quickly learn that the “high tax” bleating is bogus. Oklahoma's combined local, state and federal tax bill is America's lowest.

The fundamentalist-led editorial board would easily qualify for John Birch Society membership – but the Birchers would probably turn them down as too radical.

Look for coy editorials produced by a young thing who doesn't know her education facts from a hole in her ideology. She prints the usual rightwing cant, bemoaning low test scores and too much administration.

Not once in the more than 50 years I have read that paper has it pointed out how poorly Oklahoma funds education – 47th per pupil this year, and the lowest percentage of the state budget in history.

The paper bitterly fought the 1990 bipartisan blue ribbon year-long analysis that led to HB 1017, pulling public education up out of the mud.

Leader of the reform was Republican Gov. Henry Bellmon, who took merciless criticism from the paper. [I would share my copy of the task force report with you.]

They fought HB 1017 funding to no avail because Oklahomans – forced to vote on it due to the paper's opposition – told the paper to go to hell.

Oklahoma was making great strides until the people elected a governor of the paper's choosing, Frank Keating, a Catholic-educated bigot who despises public school teachers and ridiculed administrators.

After years of progress, education's free-fall began under him, the biggest wastrel ever to sit in the governor's chair.

Thankfully, the succeeding Democratic governor, Brad Henry, is pro-public education and has worked against heavy odds [mostly Republican] to restore the Bellmon reforms lost under Keating. He has been only partially successful.

The paper supported MAPS for KIDS, first capital improvement money for public education in 30 years. They had little choice – a fed-up business [read advertisers] community spearheaded the campaign.



Brad, why do you run to the bathroom every time Lance Cargill's name is mentioned?

This is the same Cargill who pledged to shrink state government, then personally pushed the creation of two new state agencies – one of them “faith based” and it may be unconstitutional.

This is the same Cargill who promised to empty the Democratic pork barrel – then approved thousands more, including \$100,000 to his own foundation. Is that legal?

That money was laundered through the State Department of Commerce to Cargill's 100 Ideas Foundation. It is grossly transparent – everyone believes he is using it to run for governor two years hence.

Among others, I can give you 12,000 reasons why Cargill ought to hang his head in shame – thanks to him, that many students are denied CareerTech training this fall, including 400 dropouts who wanted to come back.

I have covered every House Speaker back to 1960. None prevaricated to the degree that Cargill has.

It's a sure sign the sun is setting on state government when a little fabricator such as Lance Cargill casts long shadows.

You will have to contend with a steady stream of op-ed anti-public education rightwing propaganda, especially from local home school bigots calling themselves the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

Does Oklahoma have problems? Of course. It pays one of the lowest average teacher salaries in the nation, creating a situation so bad that the average new teacher leaves in less than 10 years. Yet Oklahoma has some of the best prepared teachers in America and high curriculum standards.

The paper pumps for “merit” pay for teachers, despite the fact we are dead last in salaries in this region. They know that vital across-the-board salary increases would cost more – and they deplore that.

Oklahoma has far too many school districts, including 114 dependent elementary schools, many of them located within the same community. Some are superb, others ought to be consolidated.

The paper has yet to crusade on the school consolidation issue because it has been the third rail of politics in previous attempts. Keep those rural readers!

They pummel Oklahoma City public school test scores but not one publication in Oklahoma has done less to fight the poverty, divorce, drugs, lack of parenting, dropouts and gang issues that create the test scores. It's easier to blame the schools.

Finally, you need to know that despite having some fine reporters, the paper has been dubbed the worst daily in the nation by Columbia Journalism Review. Fewer than half of Oklahoma City residents subscribe.

They editorially tell you that you need all the community support you can get and you better deliver. Just remember, if you cross them on their wicked voucher-driven plan to destroy public education, look out!

Childhood Poverty

Children who grow up poor cost the economy \$500 billion a year because they are less productive, earn less money, commit more crimes and have more health related expenses, according to a new study.

“The high cost of childhood poverty to the U.S. suggests that investing significant resources in poverty reduction might be more cost effective than we thought,” said Harry J. Holzer, an economist at Georgetown University and the Urban Institute and one of the four authors of the report.

Holzer was one of several poverty experts who testified to the House Ways and Means Committee as the report was released.

The new chairman of the panel, Rep. Charles B. Rangel, D-New York, said the experts were appearing “not as bleeding hearts, but to calculate the costs of poverty to our economy and society.”

The hearing was the first of many expected over the coming year intended to focus attention on the 37 million Americans who live below the official poverty line, defined as \$19,350 a year for a family of four.

For more than 10 years, lawmakers had mainly focused on sweeping welfare changes passed in 1996 that imposed time limits and strict work requirements on welfare recipients.

In the process, Democratic staff members in the House and Senate said other crucial poverty-related topics have been neglected.

Garrett Wants Longer School Day, Year

Do Oklahoma students spend enough time in the classroom? State Superintendent of Public Instruction Sandy Garrett doesn't think so.

Her proposal to extend the school day one hour and the school year at least five days ignited a furious debate that is certain to last well into the 2008 legislative session, if not beyond.

Few have taken issue publicly with Garrett's assessment that Oklahoma's school year is too short – when compared with other states – or that there are too many interruptions that further cut into instructional time – think extracurricular activities, parent-teacher conferences and the like.

WHO'S GOING TO PAY FOR IT?

The issue is money – and whether the tax-cut-obsessed, Republican-dominated Legislature is willing to pony up for the new expenses, including making faculty and staff work longer.

Don't hold your breath. State lawmakers talk the talk, but rarely walk the walk when it comes to education: Oklahoma ranks fourth from the bottom in per-student spending, nearly 25% [or \$2,087 per student] below the national average. And state teacher pay remains about \$1,000 below the regional average.

Even so, Garrett's proposal is important because it focuses attention on one step Oklahoma could take to ensure its students are increasingly competitive in the global economy.

"Some say you can 'survive or thrive,'" Garrett said in her recent State of Education address to about 2,500 education leaders gathered in Oklahoma City. "I opt for the latter.

NEW SKILLS TO COMPETE

"As Oklahoma school leaders, we're on the starting line of our state's next century of public schools. We're in a race to protect the time of childhood and to use it in the best interest of children who, as adults, will need skills far beyond what we possess today."

Oklahoma students currently are required to attend classes six hours per day, 175 days per year. By contrast, American students on average attend school for 6½ hours each day and at least 180 days annually. Internationally, Japanese students attend school 240 days each year and Chinese students are required to attend 200, 9-hour days of classes.

The extended instructional day and school year, Garrett said, will not be enough by themselves: Schools must do a better job of utilizing time already available by "eliminating interruptions of instruction and getting the clutter out of the rest of the school day.

"The complicated relationship between learning and time indicates that improving the quality of time used for instruction is at least as important as adding to the quantity of time spent in school."

TEACHERS WANT EARLIER PROMISES KEPT FIRST

State teachers already are rallying to oppose Garrett's proposal [as well as GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill's latest "new idea," merit pay for teachers, a right-wing, anti-public-education scheme that has failed everywhere it's been tried] unless state leaders keep their commitment to elevate teacher salaries to the regional average.

The School 'Competition' Canard

By Lynn Green

I have been a teacher in the Oklahoma City Public Schools for 14 years, so I keep an eye out for what is said in the local media about education, especially public education. Lately, I have seen many letters, op-ed pieces and editorials trying to revive the idea of taxpayer-funded "vouchers" for private schools.

The constant drumbeat in these pieces, most of which come from minions from the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, is that by encouraging "school choice" and "competition" between private schools, charter schools, and public schools, we will improve educational opportunities for Oklahoma's school-age children. The writers argue, "If competition is good for business, then why not for schools?"

Fair enough. However, let us remember that competition can only occur when people or institutions play on a level playing field. If athlete A is allowed to run unfettered while B is required to carry a 40-pound field pack during the race, one can hardly be surprised if A wins most of the races.

So why don't those harping for competition also demand that schools compete equally? Let the public schools do as our private and charter school counterparts do.

WHAT IF PUBLIC SCHOOLS WERE ALLOWED TO ...

Let public schools require students to apply for entrance into our schools, and let us screen those who apply rather than take all comers.

Let us require that these students meet academic performance requirements and reject those who don't measure up.

Let us require that these applying students' records be free of discipline problems, if we so choose, or let any "problem children" be admitted on the condition that they exhibit good behavior.

Let us turn down "special needs" children if we feel they will require too many modifications, too many resources, or too much money for their care [a major reason why private schools can educate students at lower costs].

HOW ABOUT MANDATING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT?

Let us require that parents sign contracts requiring that they give 20 hours or more of "volunteer" service to the school or risk having their child expelled from



Rep. Ed Cannaday, D-Porum, himself a former school administrator, also took exception to Garrett's remarks, saying she "failed to mention the frequent interruptions to instructional time required by state mandates and required staff development schedules."

"Are the Legislature and the state of Oklahoma ready and willing to increase the common education budget by 20% ... to attempt this unproven technique to solve an unidentified problem?" Cannaday said. "I believe that the state government will be more responsible than this. We will expect specific problems to be identified with specific proposed research based solutions before we commit to such a large increase in expenditures."

GOP STILL BASHING SCHOOLS, OEA

Not surprisingly, Republicans used the debate to bash public schools and the Oklahoma Education Association.

For example, Cargill's mouthpiece, Damon Gardenhire, whined to the Daily Disappointment that – even before the idea has been discussed thoroughly – OEA leaders are urging members to express their opposition to state lawmakers.

Imagine that: Teachers, the real experts, want their voices heard – before a decision affecting their lives is made. How un-American! Gardenhire is sipping too much of the GOP Kool-Aid.

Meanwhile, Rep. Paul Wesselhoft, R-Moore, said he thinks Garrett's proposal falls short. He's drafted legislation that would extend the number of school days from 175 to 190.

STILL ASSERTING DEBUNKED CHAMBER REPORT

Wesselhoft cited a widely discredited U.S. Chamber of Commerce assessment of American schools – a report that gave Oklahoma public schools an F – as evidence supporting his proposal.

"Whether we like it or not, our children will have to compete in a global economy when they enter the workforce, and we must make sure they have every reasonable advantage possible."

Watch closely. Wesselhoft and the hard-right, anti-public education House leadership talk piously about "improving" state schools, but the reality is, they work tirelessly to create a recipe for failure: They routinely under-fund and over-mandate schools.

Their goal? Replace the nation's marvelous public system with parochial schools that promote fundamentalist Christianity.

our institutions.

Let us require that once students are admitted to our schools that they keep their academic performance at a required level or face being expelled without recourse to any mandated due process rights.

Let us require that students conform to all of our rules and codes of conduct or risk expulsion, again without recourse to due process.

Let us administer to special needs children free from the need for low class sizes [10 or fewer students per class], teacher aides, and special equipment required by federal law.

Let us be free from the need to administer required state tests or the need to report on our academic results.

WHAT 'CHOICE' REALLY MEANS

Private schools and charter schools do not follow all of the above policies, but all follow several of them. At the very least, all private/charter schools demonstrate what is really meant by "school choice": the schools get to make the choices.

And if the student does not perform, then the school gets to choose to leave the child behind for someone else, the public schools, to pick up the pieces.

Public schools, by law, have to honor all students' right to an education, and they cannot simply "kick kids out."

The process for dismissing students from our schools is long and cumbersome because if we send the kids out, there are not too many places, this side of jail, which will take them in.

In light of all this, the surprising fact, shown by study after study, is that when students from similar demographic backgrounds are matched, public schools out perform all other forms of school-age education with the possible exception of home schooling. We do out race them, 40-pound pack and all.

Just remember this the next time you read someone extolling the "virtues" of educational competition.

– The author is an English instructor at Oklahoma Centennial High School in Oklahoma City and chairman of the Oklahoma County Democratic Party

Oklahoma's Taxes As Deficient As Bridges

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Our shortsightedness in public policy becomes evident to some of us only when it rises up to strike us in the face, as it has now done with our failure to tax ourselves to pay for maintenance of bridges all across the country.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Oklahoma where 27% of our bridges are classified as structurally deficient.

This should not be surprising, since Oklahoma has made tax limiting and tax cutting priorities for years. This self-destructive trend has been exacerbated by the Republicans now in control of the House and the legislative process.

But it is the people of Oklahoma who are to blame. We elect representatives who will vote to contain or reduce taxes. We vote for those who promise to cut expenditures.

SPECIAL INTERESTS DOMINATE

We allow special interest campaign donors and lobbyists to control our legislators, as well as our congresspersons, in order to keep their tax breaks and lower tax rates.

When any business mentions "new jobs," we jump to give them a tax break.

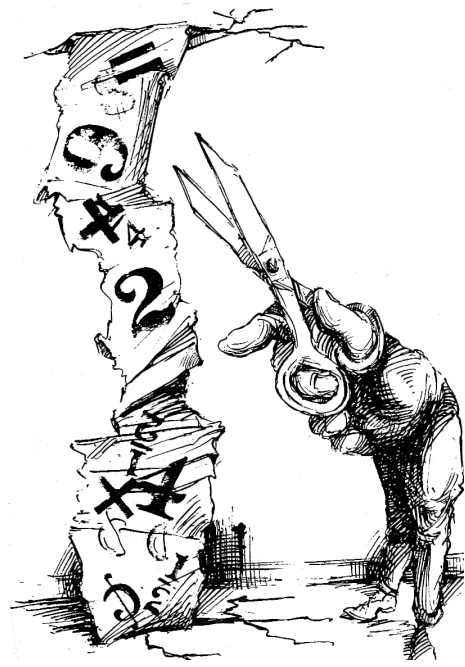
Rather than raise "road user" [gas] taxes to finance roads and bridges, our Legislature resorted to questionable mortgaging of future federal aid dollars to finance state bonds for road building. These payments now come off the top of current monies.

When Oklahoma voters had an opportunity to vote for an increase in gas taxes to bring those up just below surrounding states, stupidly we voted the tax down.

PENNY-WISE, POUND-FOOLISH TAX POLICY

Oklahoma tax policy is myopic. It is "penny-wise and pound-foolish."

Our Legislature voted a generous, state financed program of scholarships for high school students who take a college-prep curriculum - without enacting a tax to cover its cost. So, this has been taken out of monies that should have gone to support college budgets, while regents have had to turn around and keep rais-



ing fees that students pay.

The Legislature authorized highly questionable bonds to pay for \$500 million in new or remodeled facilities without enacting a tax to retire them as the Constitution requires. Now payments for those bonds are being taken out of budget money that should be going for college operations.

We are financing new prisons in much the same fashion. Our prison crisis is brought about mostly by failure to enact sensible sentencing laws and to allow parole authorities to do their job.

THERE'S NO FREE LUNCH

If people had to vote a tax on bonds to finance public facilities, as our state's Constitution dictates, then we might re-examine our penal laws.

Oklahoma cannot continue to be so myopic in its tax policies. We have to pay for what we use. We have to pay for public services. We must pay for infrastructure improvements as we go.

Everybody should pay. We must limit the exemptions and privileges that are rampant in our tax laws.

- The author, aka the Militant Moderate, lives in Enid

Coal-Fired Plant Makes No Sense In 2007

By Nathaniel Batchelder

Oklahoma does not need a new coal-fired electrical generating plant.

Coal is an environmental and health hazard; other sources of electricity are cleaner; environmentally sustainable alternative energy sources are getting cheaper by the day; and as energy-efficiency and conservation become more mainstream, less electricity will be needed.

Burning coal produces 40% of the gases causing global warming. Burning coal releases pollutants causing cancer and asthma, and render fishing unsafe in thousands of American rivers and lakes. Mining coal causes environmental damage as mountains are leveled and dumped into valleys, in violation of federal law. Lawsuits against the coal industry may soon cause drastic increases in the price of coal.

Here's another perspective: On this planet, the wealthiest 20% of humanity uses 80% of the world's resources ... which means that the "poorer 80%" uses only 20% of the resources. Our consumption is 16 times per person that of the bottom 80%.

OVER-CONSUMPTION UNJUST AND UNSUSTAINABLE

This is unjust, of course. But more, it is not sustainable, even as things stand ... and the other 80% wants to achieve our consumption levels! The earth is at risk.

So, we in the United States must demand of policy-makers and industry that technologies be implemented which demonstrate that comfortable lives like ours can be achieved using 20% of the energy and resources we currently consume.

Look at the progress in this direction: Compact fluorescent light bulbs use 20% of the electricity used by regular bulbs. High efficiency electric motors reduce industrial demand.

The recycling of wastes conserves resources AND energy [recycling aluminum

uses only 5% of the electricity to produce new aluminum]. Architects are designing buildings that can heat and cool themselves. We will see cars that get 200 miles to the gallon.

We will see a resurgence of railroad transportation, which uses only 20% of the fuel of typical 18-wheeler trucks [and reducing heavy truck traffic on highways will dramatically extend their useful lives].

SMART ENERGY INCLUDES EFFICIENCY, CONSERVATION

Amory Lovins is a former nuclear energy engineer who saw, 30 years ago, that a smart energy future should include efficiency, conservation and environmentally sustainable energy production.

His Rocky Mountain Institute is a 6,000-square-foot building in Snowmass, CO. He reports that the electricity bill is \$5 a month.

Norway - or is it Finland? - has made a national commitment to be totally free from fossil fuel use by 2020. That means no coal, oil, or natural gas use in 14 years.

Clearly, it is possible to predict that Oklahoma, and the U.S., can have population increase and business growth, even as we use and need less and less energy.

TAX INCENTIVES LEAD TO DARNDEST THINGS

Federal tax and economic incentives can get people to do almost anything, even if it makes no sense. The impetus now to build new coal-fired plants has a similar federal boost.

The 2005 U.S. Energy Bill was written behind closed doors by folks who believed the U.S. should quickly build many new coal-fired plants, ostensibly for

See COAL-FIRED Page 10

Rice Hopes To End Inhofe's Reign of Error

Twenty seven years ago, a first-term, back-bench state senator jumped into Oklahoma's U.S. Senate race. The pundits gave Don Nickles no chance.

But the rookie Republican not only won in one of the biggest upsets in state political history, but he also was re-elected three more times.

Now, another first-term, back-bench state senator hopes history repeats itself - Democrat Andrew Rice has announced he'll attempt to topple Oklahoma's senior U.S. Senate embarrassment, Jim "Global Warming Is A Hoax" Inhofe.

Rice's task is considerably more daunting than Nickles', especially given Oklahoma's steady march to Red-State status.

The lightly-regarded Nickles sought an open seat, wiping out the Democratic nominee, Andy Coats, who was so overconfident he ran one of the worst statewide campaigns in modern Oklahoma history.

Rice, who succeeded the term-limited Bernest Cain in Oklahoma City's District 46, is challenging a 13-year incumbent with a well-deserved reputation as one of the meanest, toughest political streetfighters around.

"This will be a tough and expensive race," Rice wrote in a letter to his supporters earlier this month. "In fact, I will need to raise several million dollars just to

compete against Inhofe and the national Republicans who will stop at nothing to help him extend his 40-year career in elective politics."

For months, Rice said, he encouraged other, better-known Democrats to "take up the challenge." When none agreed to run, he said, he decided to enter the race. Rice does not have to give up his state Senate seat to run, since he is in the middle of his first term.

"Washington is paralyzed by partisan bickering, and Jim Inhofe may be one of the most partisan senators of all," Rice wrote. "He even boasts of being the 'most conservative' senator. In contrast, as a member in the evenly divided Oklahoma Senate, I have proven that I can work with both Republicans and Democrats to get results for our state.

"Divisive politics is harming our country. That's not my style. I have already met many Oklahomans from across the state. They tell me that Washington no longer listens to them."

At least one other state Senate Democrat is considering a challenge to Inhofe: Sen. Kenneth Corn of Poteau. He has indicated he won't make a decision for several months on whether to run.

Bush Courts Boren On Iraq War Policy

Washington was buzzing over a heated meeting between President Bush and 11 moderate Republicans who told the president that their support for the war was slipping fast.

That same day in May, Rep. Dan Boren and a group of moderate-to-conservative Democrats made the trip to the White House to hear Bush out on Iraq. The tone, according to Boren, was quite different.

"Over the last six or seven years, he's really been knocked as someone who does not try to build bridges with Democrats, and I think over the last six months to a year, his office has really tried to reach out to members like me," Boren said.

The congressman even has his own dedicated White House liaison officer, Marty McGuinness, whose phone line is always open.

BOREN'S BALANCING ACT

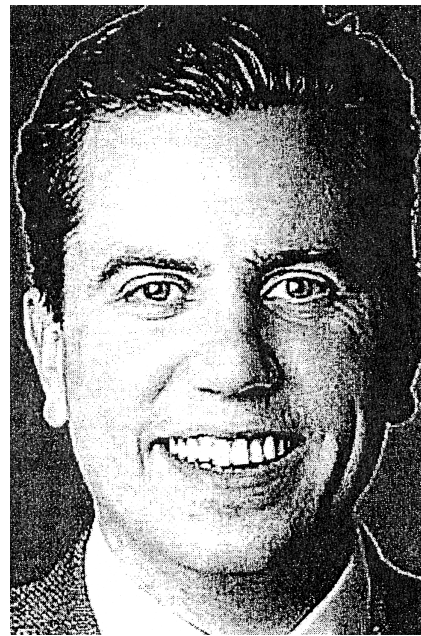
The White House knows that Boren is a man trapped between the conservative constituents of his eastern Oklahoma district and a Democratic Party pushing hard to seize control of the war in Iraq and bring it to a close.

As the young congressman weighs his options, Bush is eager to put his finger on the scales – so far, with success. This year, Boren was one of only 14 Democrats who opposed their leadership's war spending bill that included timelines for withdrawing troops.

But a powerful skeptic is whispering in his other ear: his father, former Sen. David L. Boren, whose criticisms of the war act as a counterweight to Bush's wooing.

"I'm frustrated, like most of the American people, by progress in Iraq, but at the same time, I understand that I'm not a member of the military," Boren said. "I'm just a member of Congress, and there's a fine line there that really shouldn't be broken."

TRIPS TO IRAQ: A seat on the Armed Services Committee has taken Boren to



Iraq twice and secured him face-to-face meetings with the top commander there, Gen. David H. Petraeus, most recently in March of this year.

"Morale was high," he recalled of the first trip in March 2005. "On that second trip, morale was not so great."

WHAT HIS CONSTITUENTS SAY: Boren has visited the families of each of the dozen constituents who have been killed in Iraq.

"Family members I met with earlier were definitely 'Stay the course' and all of that. Now they are much more tepid in their support. They want to see the young men and women come home. That's influential on me."

OUTLOOK: Regardless of Petraeus's report, the decision will be up to the next commander in chief. "We're already in a presidential election," Boren said. "I think this will rest on their shoulders."

MOST PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT FROM WAR OPPONENTS: "We could be using our resources in other parts of the world on the global fight against terrorism."

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An Open Letter To Rep. Mary Fallin

Youth Seek Peace, Equality And Fairness

This letter to U.S. Rep. Mary Fallin, R-OK, was read at the recent Parents Night ceremony that concluded the Peace Education Institute's week-long summer camp at Oklahoma City's Church of the Open Arms.

For five days, 13 teenagers came together with four adults to share in learning about how they can live their lives more creatively, positively and peacefully.

It's a great day in Oklahoma when a group of teenagers take the time to develop their thoughts, put them on paper, and hand-deliver them to a public official's office in order to make life better for others.

Many thanks to these camp participants, the leaders that supervised them, and those that helped fund the \$70 registration fee.

– Robyn Lemon Sellers

Dear Rep. Fallin:

We are participants in a summer camp that has focused on ways in which we can participate in the democratic process more effectively.

Our visit to your office is a final part of that journey, and we would like to share our views with you on some current issues that are important to us.

FAIR TRADE: We believe that it is important to show respect for other people [workers] and environmental resources with foreign nations and corporations. We hope that you will support policies that do so.

A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF PEACE: In order to maintain and develop a peaceful world, it is important that we create an organization that specializes in resolving conflicts peacefully. We hope that you will support this legislation.

DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION & SPECIFICALLY GAY MARRIAGE: We believe that it is not government's place to interfere in personal relationships and that a person should have a right to marry whomever they choose regardless of gender. We hope you will promote policies that end discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

THE WAR IN IRAQ: We do not support the war in Iraq and hope that it can be brought to an end quickly. We hope that you will work towards that goal.

MINIMUM WAGE: We believe that raising the minimum wage would help decrease poverty. We hope that you will support a hike in the minimum wage in the future.

COLLEGE TUITION: We are concerned that the cost of a college education is rising rapidly and would hope that you can help find a way to reduce the cost of college tuition.

THE POWER OF MONEY IN POLITICS: We have heard so much about the corrupting influence of money in lobbying and the electoral process. We ask you to support policies helping to level the playing field for all candidates, and reducing the influence of big money in lobbying for legislation.

Coburn's Weird World Gets Weirder

By Larry Hicks

Our junior senator from Oklahoma is probably one of the best-educated members of the United States Senate, possessing an accounting degree from OSU and a medical degree from OU.

These academic programs inculcate in their students strong codes of ethical practice. Besides being drilled in professional ethics and standards as an accounting undergraduate, when he graduated as a medical doctor, he swore to uphold the Hippocratic Oath.

With this background, the news of his recent comment in Senate hearings is absolutely astounding.

As I understand it, the hearing regarded in part a review of the trials and convictions of two border patrol officers.

RULES VIOLATED, EVIDENCE FALSIFIED

They were convicted of violating departmental rules and regulations and their own code of ethics when they shot an unarmed, non-threatening, fleeing suspect. They followed that by falsifying evidence at the scene and in their reports. It's all in the record.

Of course, all the neocon mouths and pens are demanding the officers' commutation, ala, Scooter Libby.

So during the Senate hearing, Sen. Tom Coburn, MD, asked: "Why is it wrong to shoot the [trafficker] after he's been told to stop?"

Huh? Hey, Senator, maybe because he was once a fetus in a womb, i.e., a human

being.

Coburn's the guy who said he thought other doctors who perform abortions which are sanctioned by law and who work within their own conscience, also under the Hippocratic Oath, and in consultation with their patients, should be put to death.

COBURN NEEDS ETHICS REMEDIATION

Maybe I'm wrong but I think Dr. Coburn needs to repeat some or all those business and medical ethics classes he attended. But maybe even that wouldn't do any good if he doesn't possess a smidgen of the good, honest, solid, natural capacity to think and reason.

I may be missing the whole thing here, and he should be granted the status of Pope, whereby he can decree all moral standards for all the rest of us.

Perhaps his grasp of what is right or wrong goes beyond any academic training and has been especially endowed by his role as a deacon of the Southern Baptist Church.

How morally distinct is he from the religiously fundamentalist Islamic doctors who tried to bomb and kill innocents in the UK in early July?

Can you believe this guy succeeded Mike Synar?

If there is a god, I pray, may she please save us from all this rain and Sen. Coburn. Amen.

– The author lives in Tulsa

Poultry Contingency: To Fee Or Not To Fee

By Adam Liptak

When Oklahoma's attorney general decided to sue about a dozen poultry companies, saying they had polluted the state's waterways with chicken manure, he did not turn to lawyers on his staff or hire an outside law firm that would bill in the usual way, by the hour.

Instead, Attorney General W. A. Drew Edmondson went into business with three plaintiffs' firms, agreeing to pay them as much as half of any money they recovered from the poultry companies.

In courts around the nation, in cases involving tobacco, lead paint and guns, state attorneys general have been outsourcing government power to private lawyers.

Business groups hate the development, in part because they would rather not litigate against sophisticated plaintiffs' lawyers on a level legal playing field. But the business groups make broader points as well.

CHICKEN COMPANIES CRY FOWL

"When someone who is exercising the state's power stands to gain from that, it violates due process," said Jay T. Jorgensen, a lawyer for one of the chicken companies. "If you got pulled over by a cop and the cop made more money if he gave you a ticket and less if he didn't, no one would think that was fair."

There is also the question of whether hiring lawyers by promising them a percentage of what they win – on contingency, in the legal jargon – violates the separation of powers.

It is, after all, the legislature's job to decide how to spend the state's money. But an attorney general who promises a percentage of a recovery to a law firm is giving away state money without legislative approval.

"These arrangements rob the legislature of its right to control what is in the public interest," said Paul M. Pohl, who represents defendants in lead paint suits in which governments are represented by lawyers who will be paid a percentage of what they win. "And the last people you want to have to decide what good public policy in your state is are contingency-fee lawyers from out of state. They're like groups of locusts looking for the next wheat field."

BUSH FORBIDS FEDERAL CONTINGENCIES

That perspective seems to be gaining traction. In May, President Bush issued an executive order forbidding contingency-fee arrangements at the federal level.

On the phone the other day, Mr. Edmondson said that how he paid his lawyers was a distraction from the serious issues in the suit. He controls every aspect of the litigation, he said, and personally argued important motions last month.

Mr. Edmondson added that the state could not afford to address the problem any other way. "We are over \$10 million in litigation costs to date," he said. "We simply lack the resources in the attorney general's office to handle this."

Asked if he had given any thought to hiring lawyers by the hour, he said, "With what?"

PRIVATELY FINANCING A PUBLIC INTEREST LAWSUIT

But Oklahoma is a government, with the power to tax and to borrow, and it does not have to turn to a private business to finance a lawsuit it says is in the public interest.

"We're not going to ask the taxpayers of the state of Oklahoma to pay the lawyers," Mr. Edmondson responded. "Our adversaries would like us to ask the legislature to choose between this litigation and increased funding for education,



for mental health or for corrections."

But that is not quite right. The taxpayers may pay either way.

Any recovery in the case belongs to the state's taxpayers, but Mr. Edmondson has signed a contract to give a big chunk of it away.

GOOD OR BAD DEAL FOR OKLAHOMA TAXPAYERS?

It will not be clear whether he made a good deal or a bad one until the case is over. Paying lawyers by the hour can be awfully expensive, too, and that money is lost if the case goes south. But lawyers doing contingency-fee work for state governments have generally made out very well, particularly in tobacco cases.

Only a few courts have addressed the legality of government contingency-fee arrangements, and they have given mixed answers.

In 1997, the Louisiana Supreme Court struck down a contingency-fee contract between the state's attorney general and its lawyers in an environmental case. The next year, Maryland's highest court upheld a similar contract in a tobacco suit.

The Rhode Island Supreme Court ducked the issue in a lead paint case last year, saying that it was not yet ripe to be decided but noting that it "implicates sensitive questions regarding the separation of powers in this state and the proper role of the constitutional office of the attorney general in relation to the exclusively legislative powers of the general assembly."

CONTINGENCY CHALLENGE FAILS ... SO FAR

In the chicken manure case, Judge Gregory K. Frizzell turned back a challenge to the contingent-fee contract last month, though he suggested that he might seek the views of the Oklahoma Supreme Court on the matter.

Not all state attorneys general have embraced contingent fees. In a speech to the American Bar Association, William H. Pryor Jr., who was then attorney general of Alabama, said they had an important role – in some cases. Contingent fees, he said, address "the need for poor persons with valid claims to have access to the legal system."

"Governments do not have this problem," Mr. Pryor, now a federal appeals court judge, continued. "The use of contingent-fee contracts allows governments to avoid the appropriation process and create the illusion that these lawsuits are being pursued at no cost to the taxpayers. These contracts also create the potential for outrageous windfalls or even outright corruption for political supporters of the officials who negotiated the contracts."

© The New York Times

Plugging Into A Cleaner, More Efficient Ride

By Shane Woolbright

Your newspaper is one of the few that has a strong sense of environmental responsibility, and I greatly appreciate the fact that you care about Oklahoma's air and water quality. I am among many who believe that America can stay strong politically and economically by leading the world in environmental advancement.

To that end, I thought I would tell you about progress being made by a public power group called Plug-In Partners. Like most such groups, this one is somewhat self-serving, but in doing so the group proposes to cure much of America's energy and air quality problems.

Few people realize that electric drive trains on automobiles are about 300% more efficient than gasoline drive trains. When trying to create all-electric cars, our engineers had to develop super drive systems to carry all that weight. Hybrid automobiles make use of these super-efficient drive trains. That's how that little bit of electricity generated in coasting actually can move the vehicle a significant distance. The effective development of a hybrid vehicle gives us what we need – lots of range and power and the promise of lower fuel use and emissions.

Plug-In Partners was spurred by the city of Austin, TX, which has a lot of wind energy and gets much of it at night. Finding a place to put that energy led someone to note that if a hybrid automobile could be plugged in, it would start the day with a full charge – a charge gotten during the night when power use is low. A major effort was begun some two years ago.

PLUG-INS ALREADY ON THE ROAD

Today, some utilities as well as Google have had Toyota Prius models modified to have a plug-in component. A Prius costs \$22,000 and the plug in component done in the after market cost some \$12,000 to install. It's mainly a somewhat bigger battery pack, different software, and a flap like a fuel tank for the plug-in.

By having a full battery in the morning, the car can go 30 miles on the overnight charge. At OG&E prices, that would be about 27 cents worth of energy. Imagine the impact if the first 30 miles of driving each day were from the electric grid. Removing 30 miles of commuting operation would eliminate most auto emissions in the commute in major cities.

The air quality improvement would be worth a fortune, the Centers for Disease Control and the American Medical Association would note that many, many billions of federal funds would be saved each year from reduced respiratory problems.

There would be a benefit that would be difficult to calculate in terms of reduced global warming effects. Consumers would be able to save substantial sums on fuel purchases. But more than anything, we could cut our balance of payments deficits, and we could stop sending money to Africa and Asia for oil imports. Of course, this ruins the economy of the Middle East, but that's another problem.

IMAGINE 80 TO 100 MILES PER GALLON OF GAS

America may not be able to change its housing very quickly, but we turn over our car fleets in a hurry. A production line Prius with a plug-in hybrid methodology [or maybe Ford or GM] would need cost no more than \$25,000 – you don't need the post-construction high cost of conversion.

Changing half of America's cars to various types of plug-in hybrid means an America that has cars that get the equivalent of 80-100 miles per gallon of gasoline used. The oil import mess and the trillions we spend on defense of oil disappear. The defense savings and health care savings are such that congress has included \$2,500 tax credits for purchase of such vehicles. It should be more.

See ALTERNATIVE Page 10

Nothing Beats A Broad General Education

By Pat Piety

In 1956-57, when I was a freshman at OSU, there was a cartoon in the English department with a picture of a dopey-looking guy and the caption, "Yesterday I cudn't spell enjuneer, and today I are one."

About the same time, in the engineering department, my calculus teacher told someone [not me, I hasten to add], "If you don't want to work hard, major in the humanities."

Relations between the sciences and humanities have always been characterized by a certain tension, but as an English major and math minor, I developed a healthy respect for both, and I believe a broad general education for all students is in the best interest of society.

Good scientists don't jump to conclusions in their research because doing so makes them feel warm and fuzzy, thank goodness.

SCIENCE, HUMANITIES COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER

And all of us – including scientists – would be better off if we used more of the objective, disciplined reasoning of scientists when we're trying to sort truth from emotion to make good decisions in areas like politics, religion, personal finances and human relations.

Conversely, people in science, business, politics and engineering who have some grounding in the humanities are more likely to think about the consequences to humanity of their decisions. At least I hope so.

Granted, there is too much information in the modern world for one person to know everything. In the early 1990s, when I was editing articles for a dermatology journal, I was amazed to note the tremendous increase in journal articles in a single medical field between 1950 and 1990.

I concluded that would be extremely difficult for a specialist to keep abreast of developments in one field and virtually impossible for a general practitioner to keep up.

'IT'S ALL ONE BODY'

Still, when I have vague medical symptoms, the family doctor's the one I consult first. Not only does he know my total medical history, but he understands that the head bone's connected to the neck bone ... and so on, down to the toe bone. It's all one body.

Girl Scouts Take Aim At Youth Woes

Girl Scouts will start the school year with a new initiative aimed at reversing some of the negative statistics among Oklahoma's youth.

The In-School Pilot Program will be offered to more than 8,000 girls in kindergarten through 5th grade, some middle schools and one alternative high school in the Red Lands Council's 15-county district in central and northwestern Oklahoma.

"For the past two years, we have provided scouting opportunities to at-risk schools in the [Oklahoma City] metro," said Cathy Stackpole, CEO for the Red Lands Council.

"We are now moving forward to expand to more schools, reach more girls and offer multiple age experiences for the entire school year."

Alex Priakos, executive with the Red Lands Council, said the in-school program is to be offered during recess twice a month. At least 600 volunteers – each committed to spending one hour each month at a designated school – are needed to make it happen.

ALTERNATIVE

From Page 9

Now, balancing foreign payments, raising the value of the dollar, reducing air pollution, fighting global warming and saving money won't happen unless we take a couple of extra steps. It's long been proposed that we tax oil to make it more costly to send a price signal to consumers. We didn't do this in the 1990s, oil fell in price, and we built gas guzzlers in response.

Putting a fleet of hybrids on the roads could send oil prices downward and start the process of energy efficiency again.

FLOATING TAX WOULD STEADY GAS PRICES

I would propose that Congress note that Americans don't particularly care for volatility in pricing. Congress should establish a floating tax on oil where the tax would rise as oil fell but the same tax would fall as oil rose. Congress would then know that its revenues depended upon Americans taking proper actions. That would help continue the move toward effective policy. The floating rate would keep gasoline at a reasonable level although far below other nations. We could know that we'd always have a benefit from good energy choices.

The combined methodology makes sense. As for the pollution from electricity, we can build regional nuclear power plants whose costs are shared by all utilities as an offset, or we as consumers can do as Google has done and put solar panels over the location where we park our cars.

Zero emission driving. But even conventional electric generation is far cleaner than automobile exhaust – no carbon monoxide – and while gasoline drives use about 18% of available energy, power plants are at the very least twice as efficient in converting fuel to energy.

Plug In Partners is supported by a great number of utilities and consumer groups. The Observer should get on board.

– The author is general manager of Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma



My children's father, a journalist, often used to complain that some reporters with majors in journalism knew how to write a story but were appallingly ignorant of the subjects they had to write about, especially government and international affairs.

My mother, a Pentecostal preacher and junior high school teacher, observed that some teachers with majors in education knew how to teach but didn't know nearly enough about the subjects they were supposed to teach, including the "Three R's."

HOW TO CREATE A BETTER WORLD

Maybe things are better now. I know law students have to take at least one course in ethics, and many medical schools require students to take courses in psychology and ethics.

I'm all for that. Human beings are complicated, and so are human relations. We all need to broaden our understanding if we want to make a truly better world.

In the final analysis, there's no substitute for looking at the big picture in deciding where to go next, and nothing provides a better look at the big picture than a broad, general education.

– The author writes for the Stillwater NewsPress

"Our programs are research-based and rich with experiential cycle learning projects," she said. "Each program is part of our Leadership Development Model which uses a myriad of projects to develop leadership skills around the Girl Scouts goals of discover, connect and take action."

In Oklahoma, Priakos said, 20% of girls do not graduate from high school, one in four girls reports wanting to leave home because of violence, and 41% of pre-teen girls are afraid of being bullied.

"Last year, Oklahoma's school system experienced more than 9,000 disciplinary actions," she said. "Of that, more than 50% included defying authority, class disruption or fighting during school hours."

The In-School program will focus on:

Health & Nutrition, Fine Arts, Safety, Literacy, STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering & Math], Self Esteem/Self Acceptance, Time Management, Peer Pressure and Good Citizenship.

Red Lands Council is providing all the materials and training necessary for volunteers. In addition, the council is looking for corporate and business partners to help underwrite the \$250,000 project.

For more information on the In-School program, call the Red Lands Council office at 405.528.3535.

COAL-FIRED

From Page 7

the purpose of energy independence from foreign oil.

Energy independence really is possible for the United States, even supporting growth ... and it can be environmentally clean and economically affordable as well.

But not with the obsolete technology of coal-fired plants. If a coal-fired plant makes no sense today, it makes even less sense to ask rate-payers to pony up, in advance, the cost of building a plant which will be obsolete before it ever produces a single watt.

Editor's Note: The author is director of Oklahoma City's Peace House. He presented these remarks in late July to an Oklahoma Corporation Commission hearing on controversial plans by Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co., American Electric Power-Public Service Company of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Municipal Power to build a \$1.8 billion, 950-megawatt, coal-fired power plant. The commission is not expected to decide the matter until at least mid-September.

The Leadership We Deserve

"In a democracy, every citizen, regardless of his interest in politics, 'holds office;' every one of us is in a position of responsibility; and, in the final analysis, the kind of government we get depends upon how we fulfill those responsibilities. We, the people, are the boss, and we will get the kind of political leadership, be it good or bad, that we demand and deserve." – President John F. Kennedy

PUBLIC FORUM

Time To Preach What You Practiced

By Sherry Blaylock

Do you remember all those typing classes back in your high school years? And how your fingers went in every direction except where they were supposed to while teachers walked around the room to find those of us who dared to steal a look down to try and find where the heck the "M" key was, and then she would scold us, "Don't you dare look at that keyboard!"

One of those typing exercises in particular has stayed with me to this very day. It went, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country." Back then that simple sentence didn't mean much except to learn how to type, but today I find myself reflecting upon that single sentence with far more attention than just a typing exercise.

With the bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City and the more recent bombing of the Twin Towers in New York, changes began to happen in America. The fear and havoc that these two events created brought forth a call to arms to search for the enemies that killed close to 3,000 Americans.

In one case the enemy was one of our own, a former soldier name Timothy McVeigh, the other was a former CIA operative named Osama Bin Laden.

MCVEIGH EXECUTED, BIN LADEN STILL AT LARGE

McVeigh was put to death, but Bin Laden remains at large. The White House quietly dismantled the CIA task force that had been searching for this murderer and told the CIA to stand down when they had several top level Al Qaeda operatives in their sights in Pakistan.

Each of these men had an agenda and used terror and fear as their tactic to get their point across. And the sad fact is, their terror tactics worked. We did allow our fear and terror to unleash a war and in the process we have united a once divided people who now hate us, but we also allowed that fear to divide Americans against Americans.

During the following years, Americans began to realize they had been manipulated and began a call for an end to the Iraq war and bring our soldiers home from the bloody pit that Iraq has become.

But there is another battle going on behind the scenes, one that all attentive American's must address and that is the loss of our freedoms here at home under the guise of protecting us from our fears.

OUR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS ARE VANISHING

The erosion of our Bill of Rights began with two bills introduced and given the unlikely names of the "Patriot Act" and the "Military Commissions Act." With the passage of these acts, our own government began to strip away some of the basic rights that have stood for centuries.

One of these was the basic Constitutional right of "Habeas Corpus" where every one has the right to stand before a court of law to face his accusers and is



given relief from unlawful imprisonment.

As the law is written and interpreted now, not only a foreign person, but even an American citizen can be imprisoned indefinitely without the benefit of any court hearing at all for the rest of their lives should the President or a even small select committee of the White House so choose.

The problem is that if someone doesn't like what you think or say [what we Americans term as Freedom of Speech] then they can accuse you of being an enemy of the State and off to jail you go. And you don't have to be designated an "enemy combatant" for the powers that be to take you off to places of deep darkness.

ACCUSATIONS, NOT EVIDENCE, PREVAIL

Your accusers don't have to prove anything – you are already guilty, even if it was just hearsay and not true at all. That American citizen is allowed no rights at all – no attorney, no witnesses, no evidence, no justice, no right of a jury trial – just prison walls until you die!

Our brave men and women in uniform from 1776 until today have given their lives to protect these precious freedoms, but because of our fear we have allowed those basic rights and freedoms to be undermined and destroyed.

It is time for all Americans to stand firm and demand that those rights be restored, lest those who fought and died for our freedoms have died in vain. Can we, as ordinary citizens, be any less committed, courageous and brave in defense of those freedoms than our soldiers in the field dying every day to defend those same freedoms?

Call your senators and demand that they support Senate Bill 185 to restore your Habeas Corpus rights. "Now is indeed, the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country."

– The author lives in Yukon

The TXT MSG 411 On Equal Rights

By James Nimmo

I'm a big fan of the Internet and think it's one of the most momentous advances in human communication since our hairy, howling, hominid ancestors developed spoken language.

Then, with Gutenberg and the invention of movable type, it became possible for large numbers of people to communicate over great distance and beyond life times, two of the greatest conveniences in maintaining human progress.

Now, the electronic Internet takes care of distance and time, while cell phones introduce the convenience of mobility in communication.

TXT MSGing [text messaging] has caught on in a big way. It allows frequently used expressions to be condensed to acronyms and abbreviations for quick notes to be displayed in the small confines of the cell phone display window.

LGBT HAS ITS OWN TXT MSG ACRONYMS

The American LGBT equality movement has its own list of TXT MSG acronyms that represents the core of discrimination still being directed at us, even as many countries in western Europe, the Southern Hemisphere, Canada, and Mexico have recognized the inherent right of their own LGBT citizens to the legal equality of a modern, humane society.

ENDA – Employment Non-Discrimination Act

MSA/HCPA – Mathew Shepard Act/Hate Crimes Protection Act

DOMA – Defense of Marriage Act

DODT – Don't Ask Don't Tell [Don't Pursue]

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE TEXT LETTERS

Anyone who knows he/she is LGBT should be familiar with these text letters and know the importance of having the first two passed and the last two overturned.

ENDA and MSA have passed the House where there is a Democratic majority, though full disclosure nags me to remind you that Oklahoma's lone DEMO in DC, Dan Boren, voted against our LGBT citizenship, but then he was swimming upstream against the popular tide with the minority of House GOPers.

I say against the tide because a recent NYTimes poll indicated that 75% of DEMOS and 49% of GOPers thought same-gender couples should have marriage equality or civil marriage. Can it be anymore clear that the people are ahead, the

engine is in front of the caboose?

A recent report tabulating the current roster of presidential candidates published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force [NGLTF, www.thetaskforce.org] shows that based on the candidates's own words, all the DEMOS support ENDA and MSA, while the GOPers have disdain or no opinion. With DOMA and DODT the count is much the same.

SEATS STILL AVAILABLE ON EQUALITY TRAIN

But some DEMOS are dragging their feet in regard to same-gender marriage. Only Kucinich and Gravel clearly support unequivocally full-blown same-gender marriage.

IMO, we LGBT people need to tell our candidates to get on the equality train. Never before have our issues been so prominently in the spotlight of public view and we need to push our candidates, regardless of party, to keep the light on fairness and parity.

BTW, CUA, and THX for reading. EOM.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

More Than 660,000 Without Health Care

Health insurance premiums for Oklahoma's working families have increased nearly 60% since 2000.

Premiums have risen 4.6 times faster than median earnings.

Medical costs are now the leading cause of bankruptcy – a fact accentuated in Michael Moore's new documentary, SiCKO.

More than 660,000 Oklahomans are without insurance, as many employers have concluded they no longer can provide it – or they require employees to carry more of the cost.

In the six-year period, health insurance premiums for employment-based health insurance coverage rose from \$6,937 to \$11,090 for families. Premium costs paid by workers alone for family coverage rose from \$1,845 to \$3,050.

BOOKS

What Would Jesus Value? The Three Ps

By Alvena Bieri

MIDDLE CHURCH

Reclaiming the Moral Values of the Faithful Majority from the Religious Right

By Bob Edgar

Simon & Schuster

272 pages, \$25

Not all religious people think alike on important moral topics. But amid the diversity, is it possible for many, if not most, of us to find a common ground?

Bob Edgar, a United Methodist who is the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches USA, thinks so.

His religious outlook is quite inclusive, and he takes in everybody when he refers to Middle Church, Middle Synagogue, and Middle Mosque.

Edgar is a well-rounded scholar and activist who served six terms as representative to Congress from Pennsylvania. He was the first Democrat from that strongly Republican area to be elected in 120 years. Then from 1990 to 2000 he was president of the Claremont School of Theology in California.

FOCUS: JESUS' ETHICAL TEACHINGS

He writes in a pithy, practical style and even uses a little humor here and there. He says he is much more centered on the ethical teachings of Jesus than the afterlife.

The moral emphasis of some today is skewed, he thinks. For example, the Bible does not mention abortion even once and mentions homosexuality twice. But there are over 2,000 Biblical references to poverty and peacemaking.

So Edgar defines the three most important moral issues of our time – or any time – as the three Ps – Poverty, Peace and the Planet.

The sad saga of persisting poverty in America goes on, even as it seems to be ignored by many, including church members.

13 MILLION AMERICAN CHILDREN IN POVERTY

In our country today, a family of five needs an income of at least \$23,000 to stay above the poverty line. That doesn't provide much money for emergencies or for savings, or probably for any health insurance. But 37 million Americans, 13 million of whom are children, are in poverty right now.

The ironic thing is that many very poor people have full-time jobs. Edgar says Jesus would be very upset about poverty, and he would also be discouraged about a political solution. He theorizes that Jesus would not be either a Democrat or Republican. Maybe a progressive populist? But he recalls the words from the Book of John: "Jesus wept."

A Stunning New Journey On Trail Of Tears

By Mike Nobles

THE CHEROKEE TRAIL OF TEARS

Photography by David G. Fitzgerald

Text by Duane H. King

Graphics Arts Center Publishing Co.

144 pages, \$27.95

If I had been told that Graphic Arts Publishing was going to publish another Oklahoma themed book of equal importance and beauty to the highly acclaimed *Oklahoma 3* [released in late 2006], I would have been a bit skeptical, to say the least.

I noted in these pages in January 2007 that Graphic Arts had outdone themselves in publishing an *Oklahoma 3* book that was stunning in both quality and beauty.

However, with the publication of this book, they have at least equaled, and perhaps surpassed, the earlier volume.

The book tells the story of what really is a not an unfamiliar event in American history: The rounding up and forced removal of Native Americans from their lands because of greed and lust for power.

THE HEARTBREAK OF FORCED REMOVAL

The Navajo experienced it with what they describe to this day as The Long Walk and the story of the Nez Perce experience will break your heart.

The Cherokee's had resided in the southeastern U.S. for as long as anyone could remember.

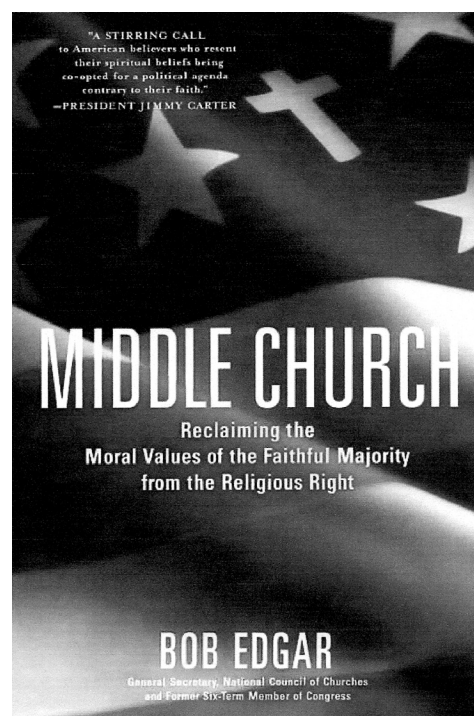
In 1838, federal and state governments began a removal process by placing some 15,000 Cherokees in prisons prior to their removal to what was then known as Indian Territory. An estimated 1,500 died in the prison camps.

It took some two years and the deaths of some 5,000 Indians before what came to be known as The Trail of Tears death march ended in a place now known as Tahlequah.

2,200 MILES AND NINE STATES

The march stretched for 2,200 miles, both on land and water, and included portions of nine states.

The National Park Service has designated the trail The Trail of Tears National



“

The moral emphasis of some today is skewed ... the Bible does not mention abortion even once and mentions homosexuality twice. But there are over 2,000 Biblical references to poverty and peacemaking.

”

Peacemaking, the second P, is a thoroughly Christian effort, too.

IRAQIS ARE PAWNS IN GEOPOLITICAL GAME

The author has visited Iraq and has seen firsthand the tragic conditions there. He says the people of Iraq are “pawns in a geopolitical game.” He is a friend of John Murtha and agrees strongly that we have had “Enough!” And we need to be careful how we talk about war and how we define “victory.”

The Planet is the third important issue.

The Biblical imperative, to protect God's creation, is clear. As we think about global warming, he tells about the Baptist minister who came up with the bumper sticker, “What Would Jesus Drive?”

And by the way, the one that asks “What Would Jesus Do?” is not funny or frivolous but very basic.

GOD AND GLOBAL WARMING

So the immediate problem for Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike – despite denial of global climate change from people like Pat Robertson and James Dobson – is that “global warming is threatening God's creation.”

Of course, it is connected to global justice issues because the rich, industrialized countries produce most of the greenhouse gases. And the areas near the coastlines – which could be eroded and flooded – are mostly inhabited by poor people.

So the Middle Church – “the faithful center of all religions” – needs to reclaim our country with a blend of “Works and hope with action.”

– The author lives in Stillwater

Historic Trail and provides maps and other information that commemorates the Trail and the Cherokees that attempted the trip.

This book is the first photo-essay to tell the story of this tragic history.

David Fitzgerald is an award-winning photographer who spent three years traveling the trail and photographing artifacts as well as historic sites. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 2005 and is without a doubt one of the premier photographers in the country.

EXTRAORDINARY TEXT, PHOTOS

Duane King wrote the text that accompanies the photos and has that special knack of writing that draws you close and almost makes you think he wrote the story just for you. He is that good. He is presently executive director of the Southwest Museum of the Autry National Center in Los Angeles and has recently authored an article for the Smithsonian Institution's prestigious series titled *Handbook of North American Indians*.

In all, he has authored more than 60 publications on Native American subjects.

This book belongs as much on the bookshelf celebrating the Oklahoma Centennial as does *Oklahoma 3* or any other publication. The writing is excellent, the photography superb, and the story needs widespread attention.

A special thanks to Graphic Arts Publishing for releasing this book during the Oklahoma Centennial celebration. It is a fitting tribute to the Cherokee people.

– The author, cofounder of *A Gathering of Writers*, lives in Tulsa



Nearly 3,600 Reasons To Impeach Cheney

By Sheila Samples

"We have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men." – George Orwell

Recently, Nova M Radio's Mike Malloy suggested the lethargy that appears to have descended on the American people is more "rage fatigue" than a lack of knowledge or comprehension of the damage wrought by this administration.

I agree, although for many of us, rather than fatigue, it's more an inability to "focus" on any single atrocity about which to be enraged. There are just too many incoming horrors at anyone time. We are in the throes of a national paralysis.

It's not that we don't know enough to be enraged. We know too much. About too many things. Our rage is splintered, spread too thin to be effective.

For the past five years, people in this country and around the world have protested against Bush and Cheney's genocidal assault on two helpless nations. As they prepare openly for yet another bloody attack on yet another nation, we continue to sign petitions, hold meetings, march against the corporate machine – all to no avail.

OUTRAGES TOO MANY TO COUNT

The issues catapulting citizens into the streets are outrageous – each one deserving of a "million man march" on its own merits. However, because we are frustrated by a relentless media blackout and by the deepening corruption, loss of freedoms and the tightening noose of tyranny, our cries are little more than a cacophony of discord – an impotent racket.

Both Democrats and Republicans are branches of the same tree of corruption.

When hacked off, a branch is instantly replaced by another, and another, each one stronger than the last. George Bush is but a snarled twig, waving at us with a frog in one hand and a firecracker in the other.

As bodies of American citizens pile up in funeral homes and cemeteries across the nation; as more and more bodies of innocent men, women and children are strewn across the Middle East, it is becoming increasingly obvious the madness will not stop until we fell this tree – dig into the darkness and strike the root.

CHENEY AT ROOT OF EVIL

We must expose – and impeach – Dick Cheney.

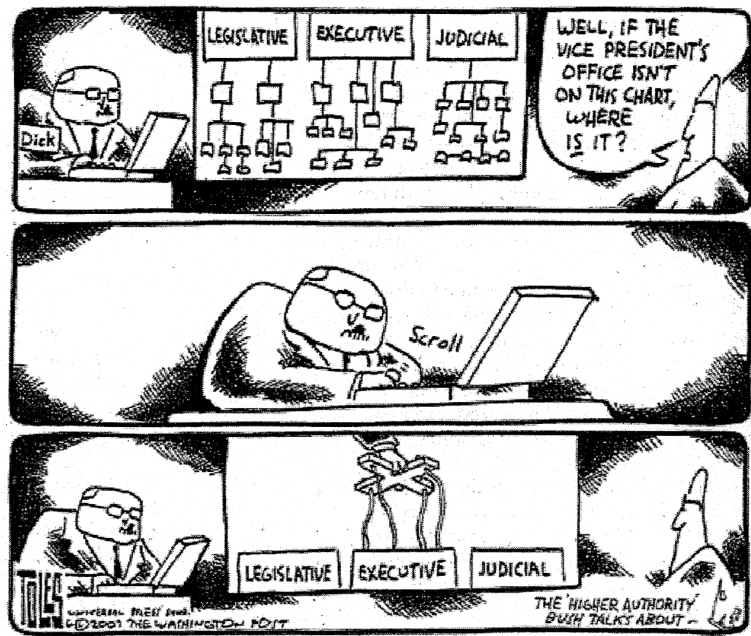
There have been Cheneys throughout the annals of time that wreak their destruction from the shadows.

In 743 BC, Marcus Tullius Cicero warned, "For the traitor appears no traitor – he speaks in the accents familiar to his victims and he wears their face and their garments and he appeals to the baseness that lies deep in the hearts of all men. He rots the soul of a nation, he works secretly and unknown in the night to undermine the pillars of a city. He infects the body politic so that it can no longer resist."

Dick Cheney must be impeached – now – before he lashes out from the dark side, and Iran is aflame; its terrified citizens displaced, dying – dead.

IMPEACHMENT ISN'T PELOSI'S DECISION ALONE

Whether to impeach is not up to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, no matter how many "arrows" she claims to have in her quiver. We've moved way beyond playing



Cowboys and Indians with this gang.

Pelosi's statement [July 2] that Bush's commutation of Scooter Libby's prison sentence "does not serve justice, condones criminal conduct, and is a betrayal of trust of the American people" is rather ironic, considering her steadfast refusal to hold Bush and Cheney accountable for their acts of treason after being elected to do just that.

Nor is impeachment up to the presidential wannabes, flip-flopping in disgraceful political one-upmanship as they vie for money to pour into the ravenous media machine. Any American who would hesitate to impeach a destructive, treasonous, power-mad dictator does not deserve to be president of this United States – now or ever.

Other than Ohio's courageous congressman, Dennis Kucinich, whose co-sponsor list to impeach Cheney has grown to 14, no other candidate dares to take a stand. No other candidate deserves a single vote.

THERE IS NO CHOICE BUT TO IMPEACH

Whether to impeach Cheney is not even up to us. We have no choice. The U.S. Constitution is very explicit about this matter. In just 31 words, Article II, Section 4, tells us, "The President, Vice President and all civil officers of the United States, shall be removed from office on impeachment for, and conviction of, treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors."

I can cite 3,588 reasons to impeach this man who lied – is still lying – so relentlessly to rush this nation into genocidal war. Kucinich's Articles of Impeachment barely scratch the surface of Cheney's treason and crimes against the state, but are more than enough to not only impeach, but to indict and convict him.

The U.S. Constitution is the greatest perception of liberty ever conceived.

It was hammered out by men determined to prevent imperial presidencies, shadow governments and seizures of power by any one branch.

It was conceived precisely to thwart efforts to destroy the republic by those whose only allegiance is to power and money.

We must rid ourselves of the traitors in our midst, starting with Dick Cheney, the one man responsible for the corruption threatening our downfall.

If we are to survive, we must strike the root.

– The author is an Oklahoma writer and a former civilian U.S. Army Public Information Officer

Cheney's Fingerprints On Hillary Attack

By Susan Estrich

Guess whom Eric Edelman – the undersecretary of defense who publicly attacked Sen. Hillary Clinton in response to her reasonable and responsible questions about how we would accomplish a withdrawal from Iraq – used to work for.

You've had 10 seconds. It's the lead. He's Cheney's man.

If you can't win the real war, try the PR war. If Iraq can't meet the goals we've set for political reform, if the greater terrorist threat is from Pakistan and not Iraq, if we're no safer today than we were when this team took over, and if your top aide would be residing in a federal pen were it not for the fact that this president has the freedom that comes from nothing left to lose, why wouldn't you try to change the subject by launching a broadside at the woman who may be the next president of the United States?

And quite a broadside it was.

HILLARY ISN'T ONLY ONE ASKING THE QUESTION

Hillary Clinton, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee – the committee charged with oversight of the Department of Defense – raised the question, two months ago, of whether we were any better prepared for leaving Iraq than entering it. And she isn't the only one who has raised that concern.

Sen. Richard Lugar, a Republican widely respected on both sides for his knowledge on defense issues, raised the very same concern.

At a recent hearing, he called for planning for the withdrawal of troops and equipment, noting that if military leaders and Congress "are not prepared for these contingencies, they may be executed poorly, especially in an atmosphere in which public demands for troop withdrawals could compel action on a political timetable."

But Edelman didn't accuse the senior Republican of giving comfort to the enemy. He wouldn't dare play politics with someone who is, technically at least, a member of his own team. He reserved that for the woman Republicans fear

most.

WE WAITED TWO MONTHS FOR THIS?

In his much-delayed and curiously timed response [it took him two months to come up with this?] to Sen. Clinton's questions, he wrote: "Premature and public discussion of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq reinforces enemy propaganda that the United States will abandon its allies in Iraq, much as we are perceived to have done in Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia. ... Such talk understandably unnerves the very same Iraqi allies we are asking to assume enormous personal risks."

Reinforcing enemy propaganda? Unnerving the allies who say they don't care if we stay or go, the representatives who take vacation rather than trying to work together, who have failed to meet every single benchmark for political change that we have too patiently set for them?

It isn't "enemy propaganda" that we aren't winning this war, have no strategy for doing so, and will continue to lose the lives of brave Americans and throw money down the toilet in the administration's increasingly lonely effort to save face.

It's the judgment of respected military and diplomatic experts, and a majority of the Congress and the country – even if it isn't a large enough one to stop a Republican Senate filibuster and force a vote.

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Is Bush Listening?

"Violence and weapons can never resolve the problems of man ... When war, like the one now in Iraq, threatens the fate of humanity, it is even more urgent for us to proclaim, with a firm and decisive voice, that only peace is the way of building a more just and caring society." – Pope John Paul II

The O'Reilly Fiction

Beware Lesbian Gangs Bearing Pink Pistols

By Tara Lohan

As if there wasn't enough to worry about these days, apparently all over the country – from New York to California – the streets are being terrorized by lesbian gangs. At least, according to Bill O'Reilly and Fox's "crime analyst" Rod Wheeler.

On a June 21 episode of the "O'Reilly Factor" on Fox, Wheeler claimed that as many as 150 lesbian gangs prowled the Washington, DC, area and across the country these gangs [some known as Gays Taking Over or Dykes Taking Over] were responsible for beating people, raping girls, and indoctrinating children as young as 10.

Oh, and they also carry pink pistols. Of course.

At one point during the segment – which was as hilarious as it was painful to watch – O'Reilly asked incredulously, "Now, when they recruit the kids, are they indoctrinating them into homosexuality?" To which Wheeler answered with the utmost certainty, "Yes. As a matter of fact, some of the kids have actually reported that they were forced into, you know, performing sex acts and doing sex acts with some of these people."

SPLC DEBUNKS THE CLAIMS

Thanks to the intrepid folks at the Southern Poverty Law Center, who were not satisfied to simply laugh off O'Reilly for the lunatic that he is, they did a little fact checking on his story and his source. Shockingly, the whole thing is crap.

As the Intelligence Report makes clear:

Nine-millimeter Glocks painted pink? Dykes taking over? More than 150 lesbian gangs in the Washington, DC, area alone? These claims are, as Wheeler suggested, "very, very interesting." They're also very, very flimsy.

Gaithersburg, MD, Detective Patrick Word, president of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Gang Investigators Network, an intelligence-sharing organization of 400 criminal justice professionals in Maryland, Washington, DC, and Virginia, said there is no evidence whatsoever of a lesbian gang epidemic in his region.

"Our membership reports only one lesbian gang," Word told the Intelligence Report.

Sgt. Brett Parson, a member and former commander of the DC Metropolitan Police Department's Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit, also questioned Wheeler's numbers.

"We have 150 to 175 total gangs in the DC area, and out of those only nine where the predominance of members are female," he said. "You simply can't make the jump that they are lesbians. I think it is fair to talk about violence and female gangs. But to sensationalize or marginalize a community by mak-



ing a statement like that seems irresponsible. "

NEITHER CRIME ANALYST NOR DETECTIVE

What's also irresponsible is referring to Wheeler as a "crime analyst" and "detective" as O'Reilly did. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that Wheeler is a member of Jericho City of Praise, "a conservative Christian megachurch in Landover, MD, whose leadership publicly advocates against equal rights for gays and lesbians."

And his professional credentials aren't much better.

"Wheeler told the Report that he spent seven years in professional law enforcement before going to work as a corporate security officer for McDonald's Corp., a job he has since left. These days, Wheeler is a 'food defense specialist' for the American Institute of Baking. Just this spring, he publicly warned that the Big Mac is vulnerable to bioterrorist attacks at '250 points' during production."

The LGBT advocacy organization GLAAD went on the defensive and sent Rashad Robinson, their Senior Director of Media Programs, to face off against O'Reilly on his show. But of course Robinson got little chance to actually say anything. The organization did issue this statement:

"The O'Reilly Factor segment essentially reported a national epidemic of lesbian gangs preying on young girls without offering one solid statistic or credible source. This type of inaccurate tabloid journalism perpetuates dangerous stereotypes about lesbians and feeds a climate of homophobia, anti-gay discrimination and violence. That's the real national epidemic, but not one you're likely to see reported with such zeal by Bill O'Reilly."

Perhaps next time GLAAD should send a lesbian. And she should be packing.

© AlterNet

Post-Attack Government Plans Off-Limits

By Jeff Kosseff

Constituents called Rep. Peter DeFazio's office, worried there was a conspiracy buried in the classified portion of a White House plan for operating the government after a terrorist attack.

As a member of the House Committee on Homeland Security, DeFazio, D-OR, is permitted to enter a secure "bubbleroom" in the Capitol and examine classified material. So he asked the White House to see the secret documents.

DeFazio recently got his answer: DENIED.

"I just can't believe they're going to deny a member of Congress the right of reviewing how they plan to conduct the government of the United States after a significant terrorist attack," DeFazio said.

Homeland Security Committee staffers told his office that the White House initially approved his request, but it was later quashed. DeFazio doesn't know who did it or why.

"We're talking about the continuity of the government of the United States of America," DeFazio said. "I would think that would be relevant to any member of Congress, let alone a member of the Homeland Security Committee."

Bush administration spokesman Trey Bohn declined to say why DeFazio was denied access: "We do not comment through the press on the process that this access entails. It is important to keep in mind that much of the information related to the continuity of government is highly sensitive."

Norm Ornstein, a legal scholar who studies government continuity at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, said he "cannot think of one good reason" to deny access to a member of Congress who serves on the Homeland Security Committee.

"I find it inexplicable and probably reflective of the usual knee-jerk overextension of executive power that we see from this White House," Ornstein said.

This is the first time DeFazio has been denied access to documents. DeFazio has asked Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., to help him access the documents.

"Maybe the people who think there's a conspiracy out there are right," DeFazio said.

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Republicans Don't Believe In Evolution

The majority of Republicans [68%] in the United States do not believe the theory of evolution is true and do not believe that humans evolved over millions of years from less advanced forms of life.

This suggests that when three Republican presidential candidates stated they did not believe in evolution, they were generally in sync with the bulk of the rank-and-file Republicans whose nomination they are seeking to obtain.

Sixty-one percent of independents believe in evolution and 57% of Democrats also believe.

The data from several recent Gallup studies suggest that Americans' religious behavior is highly correlated with beliefs about evolution.

Those who attend church frequently are much less likely to believe in evolution than are those who seldom or never attend.

The data indicate some seeming confusion on the part of Americans on this issue. About a quarter of Americans say they believe both in evolution's explanation that humans evolved over millions of years and in the creationist explanation

that humans were created as is about 10,000 years ago.

The theory of evolution as an explanation for the origin and development of life has been controversial for centuries, and, in particular, since the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's famous *The Origin of Species*.

Although many scientists accept evolution as the best theoretical explanation for diversity in forms of life on Earth, the issue of its validity has risen again as an important issue in the current 2008 presidential campaign.

Two recent Republican debates have included questions to the candidates about evolution. Three candidates – Sam Brownback, Mike Huckabee, and Tom Tancredo – indicated in response to a question during a debate that they did not believe in the theory of evolution, although they have attempted to clarify their positions in the weeks since.

Overall, 49% of American polled by Gallup believe in evolution, 48% don't, and 2% are undecided.

Gallup News Service

Torrential Rains Fall On Ever Warmer Plain

Human activities that spur global warming are largely to blame for changes in rainfall patterns over the last century, climate researchers say.

The report was released as record rains caused severe flooding in Britain, China and Indonesia.

Human-caused climate change has been responsible for higher air temperatures and hotter seas and is widely expected to lead to more droughts, wildfires and floods, but the authors say this is the first study to specifically link it to precipitation changes.

"For the first time, climate scientists have clearly detected the human fingerprint on changing global precipitation patterns over the past century," researchers from Environment Canada, that country's environmental agency, said in a statement.

MANMADE CLIMATE CHANGE TO BLAME

The scientists, writing in the journal *Nature*, found humans contributed significantly to these changes, which include more rain and snow in Northern regions that include Canada, Russia and Europe, drier conditions in the Northern tropics and more rainfall in the southern tropics.

Manmade climate change has had a "detectable influence" on changes in average precipitation in these areas, and it cannot be explained by normal climate variations, they wrote.

Weather experts in Britain raised the possibility that the current rains there may be related to climate change.

NASTIER STORMS ON THE HORIZON

"The global climate models indicate a future for the UK with drier summers and wetter winters, but storm events in the summer are predicted to be more frequent and more intense," David Butler of the University of Exeter said in a statement. "So it may well be the case that we will have to learn to live with more flooding."

Nick Reeves, executive director of the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management in Britain, said that "extreme events such as we have

Warming Globe Hits Poor Nations Worst

By Andrew C. Revkin

The world's richest countries, which have contributed by far the most to the atmospheric changes linked to global warming, are already spending billions of dollars to limit their own risks from its worst consequences, like drought and rising seas.

Despite longstanding treaty commitments to help poor countries deal with warming, these industrial powers are spending just tens of millions of dollars on ways to limit climate and coastal hazards in the world's most vulnerable regions - most of them close to the equator and overwhelmingly poor.

A recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a United Nations body that since 1990 has been assessing global warming, will underline this growing climate divide, according to scientists involved in writing it - with wealthy nations far from the equator not only experiencing fewer effects but also better able to withstand them.

WHERE MOST GREENHOUSE GASES ORIGINATE

Two-thirds of the atmospheric buildup of carbon dioxide, a heat-trapping greenhouse gas that can persist in the air for centuries, has come in nearly equal proportions from the United States and Western European countries.

Those and other wealthy nations are investing in windmill-powered plants that turn seawater to drinking water, in flood barriers and floatable homes, and in grains and soybeans genetically altered to flourish even in a drought.

In contrast, Africa accounts for less than 3% of the global emissions of carbon dioxide from fuel burning since 1900, yet its 840 million people face some of the biggest risks from drought and disrupted water supplies, according to scientific assessments.

As the oceans swell with water from melting ice sheets, it is the crowded river deltas in southern Asia and Egypt, along with small island nations, that are most at risk.

SHIFTING FROM EQUATOR TO POLES

Those in harm's way are beginning to speak out. Scientists say it has become increasingly clear that worldwide precipitation is shifting away from the equator and toward the poles.

That will nourish crops in warming regions like Canada and Siberia while parching countries such as like Malawi in sub-Saharan Africa which are already prone to drought.

While rich countries are hardly immune from drought and flooding, their wealth will largely insulate them from harm, at least for the next generation or two, many experts say.

Cities in Texas, California and Australia are already building or planning desalination plants, for example.

Federal studies have shown that desalination can work far from the sea, purifying water from brackish aquifers deep in the ground in places like New Mexico.

IT IS NOT AN EITHER/OR SITUATION

Many other experts insist this is not an either/or situation. They say that cutting the vulnerability of poor regions needs much more attention, but add that unless emissions are curbed, there will be centuries of warming and rising seas



SUMMER IN OKLAHOMA 2007

seen in recent weeks herald the specter of climate change and it would be irresponsible to imagine that they won't become more frequent."

Numerous studies and reports by a panel of scientists convened by the United Nations have reported with increasing certainty that human activities - notably the burning of fossil fuels that emit greenhouse gases - have contributed to global warming in the last half-century and that the effects of this are already evident.

The U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimated temperatures would rise 3.2 to 7.3 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100, leading to more hunger, water shortages and extinctions.

© Reuters

Editor's Note: After two years of near-drought conditions, much of Oklahoma has been swamped this year with record rainfall. In the first seven months, for example, Oklahoma City already received more rain than in a typical year.

that will threaten ecosystems, water supplies, and resources from the poles to the equator, harming rich and poor.

There are some hints that wealthier countries are beginning to shift their focus toward fostering adaptation to warming outside their own borders.

Relief organizations including Oxfam and the International Red Cross, foreseeing a world of worsening climate driven disasters, are turning some of their attention toward projects like expanding mangrove forests as a buffer against storm surges, planting trees on slopes to prevent landslides, or building shelters on high ground.

BUSH HASN'T FOLLOWED THROUGH

Industrialized countries bound by the Kyoto Protocol, the climate pact rejected by the Bush Administration, project that hundreds of millions of dollars will soon flow via that treaty into a climate adaptation fund.

The lack of climate aid persists even though nearly all the world's industrialized nations, including the United States under the first President Bush, pledged to help when they signed the first global warming treaty, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, in 1992.

It was an empty Bush promise.

Another option, experts say, is helping poor regions do a better job of forecasting weather. In parts of India, farmers still rely more on astrologers for monsoon predictions than government meteorologists.

Michael H. Glantz, an expert on climate hazards at the National Center for Atmospheric Research who has spent two decades pressing for more work on adaptation to warming, has called for wealthy countries to help establish a center for climate and water monitoring in Africa, run by Africans.

"The third world has been on its own," he said, "and I think it pretty much will remain on its own."

© The New York Times

How To Find Inner Peace

I am passing this on because it definitely worked for me and we could all use a little more calmness in our lives.

By following the simple advice I heard on the Dr. Phil show, I have finally found inner peace.

Dr. Phil proclaimed, "The way to achieve inner peace is to finish all the things you've started and never finished."

So, I looked around my house to see all the things I started and hadn't finished.

Before leaving the house this morning, I finished a bottle of Merlot, a bottle of White Zinfandel, a bottle of Bailey's Irish Cream, a bottle of Kailua, a package of Oreos, the remainder of my old Prozac prescription, the rest of the cheesecake, some Doritos and a box of chocolates.

You have NO idea how freaking good I feel!

- From Kenneth Bentley

Heartfelt Disgust With American Health Care

By Karen Webb

If everyone in France or Cuba gets the same medical treatment then we should all be so lucky as to live in France.

Even when you have insurance it is a pain. My husband had a heart attack on May 29 and it is likely he had one on May 9, but was diagnosed with a stomach problem.

One branch of one of the three main arteries was 100% blocked, the other branch was only 50% blocked which is not blocked enough for the insurance company.

Of the other two main arteries, one was fine and the other has numerous blockages, but none were 100%.

He was sent home and only after he nearly passed out after only one hour at work his first day back, the doctor was finally able to justify unblocking the 50% and then doing the first and worst of the multiple blockages.

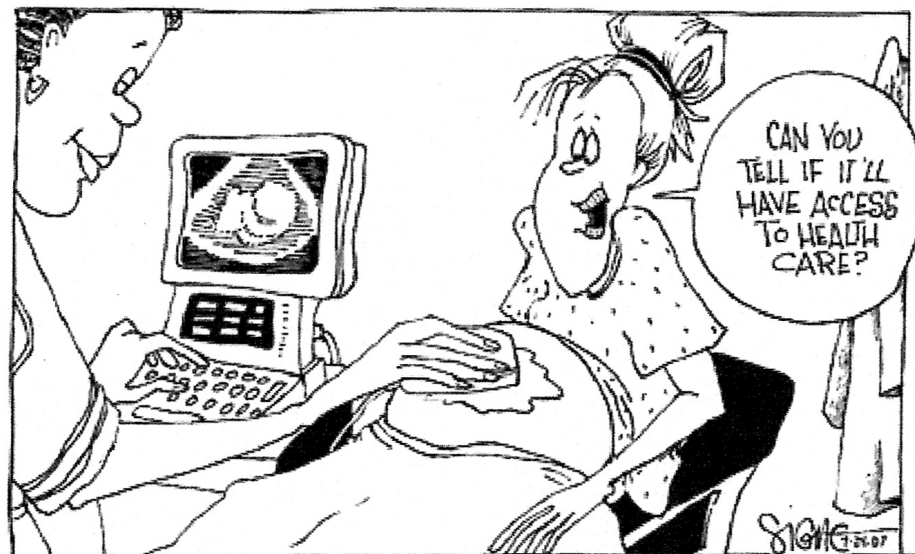
THE PRESCRIPTION GAME MADNESS

He is much better, but since the doctor hasn't 100% decided that the medication is correct and he hasn't had his final doctor's release, we had to refill his medicine again and were told the insurance wouldn't cover it unless we ordered it in 90-day supplies by mail.

We had to pay \$189 for 15 of each of the three medications. We ran out before receiving the 90-day supply so we had to get samples from the doctor's office.

When he goes back to the doctor, if everything isn't OK, then his medication will have to change, the insurance company will have to pay for a different 90-day supply and we will have a crap load of medication that we can't use.

A few years back when my daughter was still young enough to be a sponsored



dependent they kept changing the policy.

CONSTANTLY CHANGING THE RULES

First they did it using her Social Security number and then her dad's and then her's again. At the time she was on birth control which was prescribed when she was about 14 for severe endometriosis and she was on Welbutrin. She had been on them the entire year and was well-past the deductible.

After changing the policy again they told me in October that she hadn't met her deductible. I told them they were crazy, she had been on two medications for 10 months and had met the deductible the second month.

They informed me that both medications were for my husband.

I asked the woman on the phone who had neither an MD nor a pharmaceutical degree if she had any idea what the medications were and she said no.

So, I was not really nice when I suggested she tell me why a 45-year-old man, who had a vasectomy in 1979 would need birth control medication.

- The author lives in Moore

Young Kids Facing A Cavity Epidemic

By Sally Kalson

The nation's childhood obesity epidemic overshadows another epidemic - America's young children are getting more cavities in their baby teeth now than they were a decade ago.

A report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analyzed data from two six-year periods, 1988 to 1994 and 1999 to 2005.

Researchers found that the number of children ages 2 to 5 getting cavities in their baby teeth increased from 24% of the population to 28%. The 4% uptick is alarming for two reasons, said the report's author.

"This represents thousands and thousands of kids who have at least one cavity in their baby teeth compared to 10 years ago," said Dr. Bruce Dye of the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

"It's also significant because for the past 40 years we have documented a continual decline in tooth decay in children as well as adults. This is the first time the trend is going in the opposite direction."

SAME PROBLEMS AS IN OBESITY

In part, experts blame the increase on the same dietary changes causing a record number of overweight youngsters: constant snacking on processed foods, fewer fruits and vegetables, more sugary drinks at younger ages, including juice in baby bottles and sippy cups.

"I can't tell you the number of kids that come into our waiting room sipping on a Mountain Dew," said Dr. Deborah Pavlovich, chair of pediatric dentistry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine.

"If you look at the acidic nature of pop as well as the sugar, the bacteria that causes dental caries multiplies in that environment.

"Dental caries are contagious," she added. "If you let them go, they spread to other teeth. I have a 26-month-old coming in this week with 12 teeth to be restored."

Vets And Others Are Lacking Decent Care

Affordable mental-health care has taken another blow when Medicare and Tricare - one of the few health-care options for military veterans and their families - reduced the amount it will pay providers.

Medicare now pays approximately 48% of what psychiatrists and psychologists normally charge, and Tricare pays about 45% -- the result of a 9% cut in reimbursement.

As a result, some psychiatrists and psychologists have been forced to drop all people paying for mental health care via Medicare and Tricare from their rolls altogether, because they just cannot afford to keep them on.

This comes at a bad time, as a large number of returning veterans display a host of post-traumatic stress-related symptoms, and many begin to show the painful long-term effects of traumatic stress from Hurricane Katrina.

GOOD FOR COMMUNITY, GOOD FOR BUSINESS

"I'm going to always take the position that the provision of adequate mental-health care is good for any community, any business," said Dr. Elizabeth Henderson, president of the Mississippi Psychiatric Association.

She added that many do not realize how much money good mental-health care saves in the long run. "It's well worth the expense, but it's also the first thing that gets cut."

Dr. Henderson and other providers said the reduction is simply an attempt

Children are also drinking more bottled water instead of fluoridated tap water that fights tooth decay. It's not as good as fluoridated water.

HEALTHY BABY TEETH IMPORTANT

Healthy baby teeth are important because they hold the place for adult teeth to come in correctly. In addition, decayed baby teeth expose adult teeth to the same bacteria when they break through the gums, setting off a chain reaction of infection.

One source of tooth decay: Parents or caregivers with tooth decay can pass the bacteria to young children via shared utensils and cups.

Highlights from the report:

- Decay in the permanent teeth of youths age 6 to 11 decreased from 25% to 21%, and among teens it decreased from 68% to 59%.
- The use of dental sealants [a plastic coating applied to teeth that protects against decay] increased from 22% to 30% among the 6-to-11-year-olds, and from 18% to 38% among teens.
- Moderate and severe gum disease was down from 10% to 5% among adults ages 20 to 64, and from 27% to 17% among seniors age 65 and older.
- The percentage of seniors with complete tooth loss dropped from 34% to 27%.
- The number of adults who reported visiting a dentist in the past year declined, from 64% to 60%.
- Disparities persist along racial, ethnic and economic lines. Some 31% of Mexican-American children ages 6 to 11 had decay in their permanent teeth, compared to 19% of non-Hispanic white children.
- Three times as many children from families below the poverty line had untreated tooth decay as those with higher incomes 12% vs. 4%.

© The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

to "balance the books" more or less with the two federally funded health-care systems.

Dr. Michael Zakaras, a Gulfport psychologist, said the changes make it harder for the many military families that are straining right now under the weight of the ongoing wars.

WHAT IS A SOLDIER'S SACRIFICE WORTH?

"This is appalling when our soldiers and their families are making such great sacrifices," said Zakaras, who has been practicing on the Gulf Coast for nearly 30 years and seen many military families.

"We're screaming about Walter Reed and on the other hand we're slashing fees when it comes to mental-health services. Basically what it does is limit access to care and that's sad. I don't know if that's what's intended."

Both Henderson and Zakaras said there is potential legislation in Congress to alleviate the problem, but it is not just federal mental-health care reimbursement that is at issue.

"The rates of reimbursement not only with Tricare and Medicare but some major insurance carriers are not keeping up with costs of running a practice," Henderson said.

"The amount they will pay for, say, a regular visit is way below what it costs to keep the lights on in the office. The system is in need of some help."

Secret To Democrats' Success? P-a-y-g-o

By Froma Harrop

"Go ahead!" the gremlins hiss into Democratic ears. "Spend and borrow. The Republicans did it. Don't be a goody-two-shoes about this 'pay-as-you-go' stuff."

The gremlins are hard at work trying to throw a wrench into the Democrats' Paygo resolve. For them, getting Democrats to abandon their promise of fiscal discipline would be a splendid act of sabotage.

Under the Paygo rules, new entitlement spending must be offset by tax hikes or savings elsewhere. Tax cuts must be matched by spending reductions or more revenues. The point of the exercise is to rein in budget deficits.

Democrats have honored the Paygo pledge so far, but show signs of weakening. For example, they want to add \$20 billion to the farm bill for conservation, renewable fuels and other good things, but some farm-state Democrats don't want to free up the money through cuts in the subsidy program.

THE POLITICAL PAIN OF PAY-AS-YOU-GO

"It's a mess," an unidentified senior House Democratic aide told The National Journal. "It's very difficult, if not impossible, to comply with Paygo and still do everything we want to do."

How do you explain a quote like that? Gremlins.

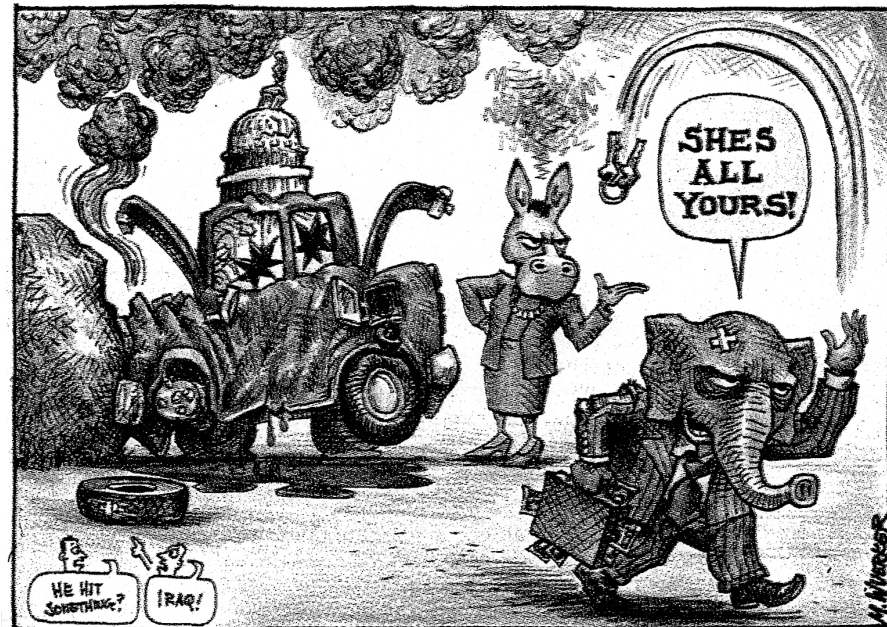
Of course it's very difficult to comply with Paygo "and still do everything we want to." Isn't it always?

The Senate Finance Committee says it just agreed on a bill to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program. The addition of \$35 billion over five years is less than the \$50 billion the Democrats had originally wanted – and must be paid for with a "politically difficult" 61-cent-a-pack increase in the federal cigarette tax. It's not easy, but the money will be found for a program that the public deems important.

GOP PLAN: LET FUTURE GENERATIONS PAY

The Republicans let Paygo expire in 2002, freeing themselves to spend, cut taxes and leave the bills to future generations – though they pretend otherwise. President Bush was just in Cleveland bragging that his tax cuts are lowering budget deficits – from \$248 billion last year to an estimated \$205 billion in 2007.

What really caused that modest improvement were a strong stock market and bigger paychecks for the richer folk – events that mainstream economists say had little to do with the tax cuts.



It's outrageous to have any deficits at this high point in the business cycle.

The Clinton administration ran enormous surpluses in the good times of the late '90s – without the "help" of the Bush tax cuts, which actually drain more revenues than they raise.

BUDGET DISCIPLINE CAN HELP DEMS POLITICALLY

Democrats can use the budget discipline forced by Paygo to improve programs. For example, the current farm subsidies go mostly to a few big agri-businesses. Democrats could reduce these corporate welfare payments and use the savings to promote ethanol production. That would do more for rural America than writing checks that encourage the creation of mega-farms and the depopulation of the countryside.

South Carolina Rep. John Spratt, chair of the House Budget Committee, has been swatting gremlins for a long time. When Republicans were in charge, Spratt tried to moderate their tax cuts. Hero to the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Democrats, Spratt is now fighting to keep his party on the path of fiscal virtue. May the hounds prevail.

Early this year, a Gallup poll showed that 76% of Americans considered the budget deficit "extremely" or "very" important. And an ABC News-Washington Post poll found that 59% trusted the Democrats to handle the federal budget, while only 32% trusted Bush.

Do Democrats want to lose this moral high ground? Sure, they could spend and borrow, just as Republicans did. But that's one of the reasons Republicans are no longer running Congress – as the gremlins know so well.

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A Primer On Executive Privilege Debate

By Eric Weiner

President Dwight Eisenhower was the first president to coin the phrase "executive privilege," but not the first to invoke its principle: namely, that a president has the right to withhold certain information from Congress, the courts or anyone else – even when faced with a subpoena. Executive privilege, though, is a murky and mysterious concept. Here, an attempt to clarify the murk.

Does the Constitution allow for executive privilege?

Nowhere does the Constitution mention the term or the concept of executive privilege. The belief that it does, the late legal historian Raoul Berger once said, is one of the greatest "constitutional myths."

So how can a president simply withhold information if the Constitution doesn't give him the power to do so?

Presidents have argued that executive privilege is a principle implied in the constitutionally mandated separation of powers. In order to do their job, presidents contend, they need candid advice from their aides – and aides simply won't be willing to give such advice if they know they might be called to testify, under oath, before a congressional committee or in some other forum.

How long have presidents been invoking executive privilege?

For as long as there have been presidents. In 1792, George Washington rebuffed efforts by Congress and the courts to get information about a disastrous expedition against American Indian tribes along the Ohio River. Washington lost that battle, and he handed over all of the papers that Congress had requested. But that hasn't stopped many presidents over the years from invoking executive privilege.

Who usually wins these battles: the president or Congress?

It can go either way. President Eisenhower successfully kept officials from his administration from testifying at the Army's hearings on Sen. Joe McCarthy. [The hearings concerned allegations that McCarthy had pressured the Army to give preferential treatment to a former aide, and McCarthy's counter-charges.]

During the Watergate investigation, though, President Nixon failed in his attempts to withhold White House audio recordings from special prosecutor Leon Jaworski. Nixon handed over the tapes and, four days later, resigned. In his memoirs, Nixon wrote dejectedly, "I was the first president to test the principle of executive privilege in the Supreme Court, and by testing it on such a weak ground, I probably ensured the defeat of my cause."

Didn't the Nixon case settle the issue of executive privilege once and for all?

No. In fact, in its ruling on the Nixon tapes, the Supreme Court noted "the valid need for protection of communications between high government officials and those who advise and assist them in the performance of their manifold duties." In other words, while rejecting Nixon's particular claim of executive privilege, the

court left the door open for future claims by future presidents. And there's a key distinction to keep in mind: The Nixon case was part of a criminal investigation; the current case involving the Bush administration is not.

Is executive privilege a partisan issue?

No. Presidents from both parties have invoked executive privilege. And neither side has a clear winning record. In 1998, President Clinton became the first president since Nixon to invoke executive privilege and lose in the courts, when a federal judge ruled Clinton aides could be called to testify in the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Do presidents invoke executive privilege mainly in matters of national security?

No, not at all. Presidents have cited the privilege for all sorts of issues. For instance, the Bush administration invoked the spirit, if not the letter, of executive privilege when it argued that Vice President Dick Cheney need not disclose what was discussed during his Taskforce on Energy meetings. The Supreme Court upheld the administration's claim in 2004. But Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, issued this warning: "Once executive privilege is asserted, coequal branches of the government are set on a collision course."

Could this current case – involving requests for documents from Bush administration officials – end up in the courts?

It's possible, but not likely, legal experts say. Neither side wants to get mired in a protracted legal battle, so the prospect of a negotiated solution is more likely. Since 1975, 10 senior administration officials have been called to testify before Congress, but the disputes were all resolved before getting to court. No president has mounted a court fight to keep his aides from testifying on Capitol Hill.

Why has executive privilege been such a contentious issue?

Because it is at the fulcrum of a very delicate balancing act – between a president's right to candid advice and Congress' right to information. Also, executive privilege is a power that political parties tend to support when they control the White House, but abhor when they're out of power. For that reason, neither party is eager for a definitive ruling from the Supreme Court. For its part, the high court seems to be in no hurry to wade into such contentious constitutional waters.

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Democrats, Abortion And Campaign '08

How Democrats Are Trying To Reshape The Debate

By Stephanie Simon

Sensing an opportunity to impress religious voters — and tip elections — Democrats in Congress and on the campaign trail have begun to adopt some of the language and policy goals of the antiabortion movement.

For years, the liberal response to abortion has been to promote more accessible and affordable birth control as well as detailed sex education in public schools.

That's still the foundation of Democratic policies. But in a striking shift, Democrats in the House recently promoted a grab bag of programs designed not only to prevent unwanted pregnancies, but also to encourage women who do conceive to carry to term.

The new approach embraces some measures long sought by antiabortion activists. It's designed to appeal to the broad centrist bloc of voters who don't want to criminalize every abortion — yet are troubled by a culture that accepts 1.3 million terminations a year.

"It's not as exciting as arguing," said antiabortion activist Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life. "But it's the best possible thing for women."

The Reducing the Need for Abortions Initiative provides millions in new funds to:

- Counsel more young women in crisis to consider adoption, not abortion.
- Launch an ad campaign to inform needy women that they can receive healthcare and other resources if they are "preparing for birth."
- Expand parenting education and medical services for pregnant women, in some cases by sending nurses to their homes.
- Offer day care at federal job-training centers to help new mothers become self-sufficient.

The initiative, part of a broader appropriations bill, passed the House with solid bipartisan support. A separate measure, still pending, calls for funding maternity and day-care centers on college campuses so pregnant students won't feel they must have an abortion to stay in school.

Such efforts are aimed at alleviating the concerns women often cite to explain why they've turned to abortion: financial strain, fear of raising a baby alone, disruption to work and school.

"We are willing to talk about anything that helps women make good choices," said Rep. Diana DeGette, D-CO, co-chairwoman of the bipartisan Pro-Choice Caucus. Preventing unplanned pregnancies, she said, "is not the whole story."

Rep. Tim Ryan of Ohio, a Democrat who opposes abortion, goes even further. For the first time, he said, his party is sending a forceful message to conflicted women: "Bring the baby to term, and we'll provide for you."

The Senate will take up the spending package later this year. In the meantime, liberal stalwart Edward M. Kennedy, D-MA, is working with staunch conservative Sam Brownback, R-KS, to mandate more support services for pregnant women carrying fetuses with genetic abnormalities, such as Down syndrome. Focus on the Family, an influential conservative ministry, praises that bill as "life-affirming."

But conservatives also accuse Democrats of using abortion rhetoric to sell the right on traditional liberal priorities, such as healthcare funding. Democrats have rejected other ideas that conservatives consider highly effective in reducing abortions, such as requiring women to view ultrasound images of the womb.

"In terms of bridging the ideological gulf, you need to ask: Is this a two-way street?" said David K. DeWolf, a law professor at Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA, who has advised antiabortion groups.

Rep. Mike Pence, a Republican from Indiana, sees hypocrisy in the fact that much of the new family planning funding will go to Planned Parenthood. The money can't be used to terminate pregnancies — it's for birth control and gynecology services. But Pence says it's ludicrous to send tax dollars to the nation's largest abortion provider in the name of reducing abortions.

"That's not a common ground I can accept," Pence said.

From the left, too, the new strategy has drawn barbs. Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-NY, urges her party to stick to promoting contraception, instead of trying to sway women's choices after they conceive.

"I don't believe any woman decides between having an abortion or not on the

Why Pro-Choice Is Bad For Democrats

By Melinda Henneberger

I keep reading about a universe in which social conservatives are warming to Rudy Giuliani. This would have to be a place where his estranged children and three wives and multiple appearances in fishnets were irrelevant to the Republican base.

Where the nice gay couple he moved in with between marriages would be asked to appear in the film montage at the nominating convention in St. Paul.

Even in the real world, a pro-choice Republican nominee would be a gift to the Democrats, because the Republican Party wins over so many swing voters on abortion alone.

Which is why Fred Thompson, who is against abortion rights, is getting so much grateful attention from his party now; why, despite wide opposition to the war in Iraq, Democrats must still win back such voters to take the White House next year.

Over 18 months, I traveled to 20 states listening to women of all ages, races, tax

brackets and points of view speak at length on the issues they care about heading into '08.

They convinced me that the conventional wisdom was wrong about the last presidential contest, that Democrats did not lose support among women because "security moms" saw President Bush as the better protector against terrorism. What first-time defectors mentioned most often was abortion.

Why would that be, given that *Roe v. Wade* was decided almost 35 years ago? Opponents of abortion rights saw 2004 as the chance of a lifetime to overturn *Roe*, with a movement favorite already in the Oval Office and several spots on the Supreme Court likely to open up.

Catholic bishops spoke out more plainly than in any previous election season and moved the Catholic swing vote that Al Gore had won in 2000 to Bush.

Many of them, Catholic women in particular, are liberal, deep-in-their-heart Democrats who support social spending, who opposed the war from

the start and who cross their arms over their chests reflexively when they say the word "Republican."

Some could fairly be described as desperate to find a way home. And if the party they'd prefer doesn't send a car for them, with a really polite driver, it will have only itself to blame.

What would it take to win them back? Respect, for starters — and not only on the night of the candidate forum on faith. As it turns out, you cannot call people extremists and expect them to vote for you.

Respect would require an understanding that what supporters of abortion rights genuinely see as a hard-earned freedom, opponents genuinely see as a self-inflicted wound.

Again and again, these voters said Democrats are too unwilling to tolerate dissent on abortion. It is a point of orthodoxy no more open to debate within the party than the ordination of women is in Rome.

Democratic Party leaders should also stop pushing the perception that Republicans are natural defenders of the faithful.

For years, they have done just that by tirelessly portraying our current president as this committed — indeed, obsessed — pro-lifer who would stop at nothing to see *Roe* overturned.

Karl Rove couldn't have said it better himself — this was better advertising than hard money could buy.

Today, in a similarly oblivious way, the leading Democratic presidential contenders are condemning the Supreme Court's recent decision to uphold a ban on the procedure known as partial-birth abortion.

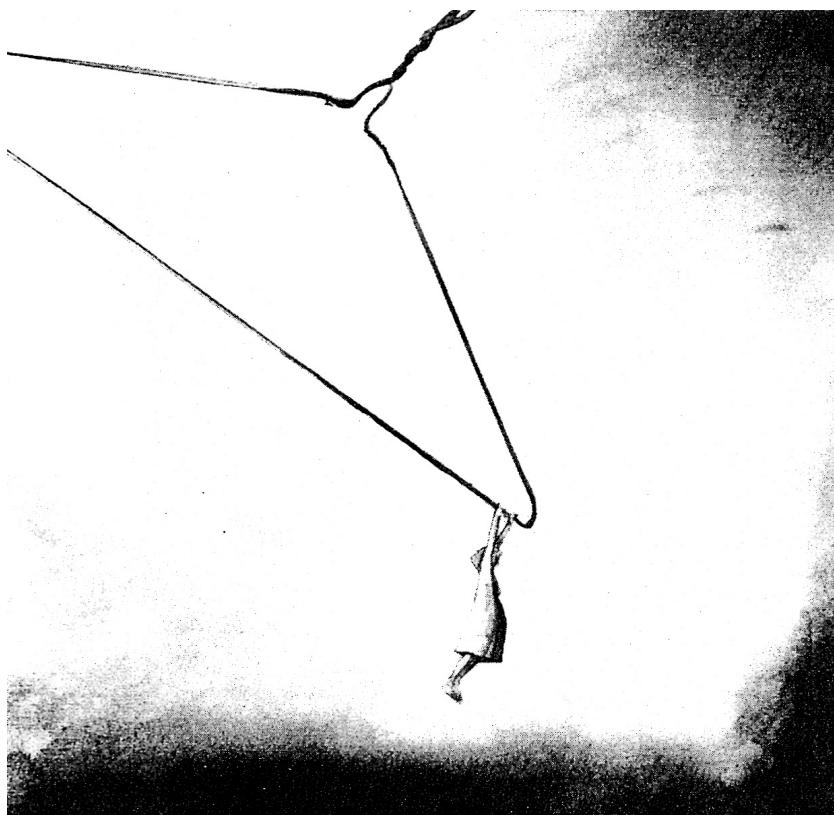
An overwhelming majority of Americans, polls show, support a ban. Legal scholars have underscored the narrowness of the ruling in the partial birth case which does not outlaw all late-term abortions.

Yet the leading Democratic candidates, all of whom are lawyers, choose to overstate its impact.

Actually, it is a stark reminder of how fully capable they all are of losing it. A Democratic senator I spoke with recently did not see the disconnect between public opinion and the party's position as any reason to worry:

"Make no mistake; this is a pro-choice country, period."

See PRO-CHOICE Page 19



Court Curbs Unions' Political Use Of Fees

By David G. Savage

In a setback for organized labor, the Supreme Court has ruled that states may bar public employee unions from using dues for political purposes unless each member gives explicit approval.

The 9-0 ruling opens the door for states to pass laws restricting use of union dues.

Nationwide, 12 million workers in public and private sector jobs pay dues or fees to a union. It underwrites critical collective bargaining and other employee rights that would otherwise not exist.

President Bush and other conservatives have campaigned in favor of "paycheck protection" laws to limit the political use of union dues, long a major source of funding for Democratic candidates. The court's ruling implicitly endorsed those Republican efforts.

These laws have gained little traction in Congress or around the nation.

Twice in the last decade, California voters have rejected ballot initiatives that would have required unions to ask the permission of employees before using their dues for politics.

CALIFORNIA VOTERS TROUNCE GOVERNOR

The most recent defeat came in 2005, when Proposition 75, strongly backed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, lost by seven percentage points.

While some union foes called the court's ruling an important victory and predicted it would lead to other such laws, the National Right to Work Committee acknowledged that the court decided a narrow issue and that its direct effect figures to be limited.

RESHAPE

From Page 18

basis of 'Is there day care available?' " Slaughter said. "Our aim here is to let women know we can help them not get pregnant."

Democratic strategists, however, say that message is too simplistic.

From a practical standpoint, increasing access to contraception will not eliminate abortion. Roughly half of all women who seek abortion said they were using some form of birth control, albeit inconsistently, the month they conceived. Some of the states, such as California, that have spent the most to improve access to family planning still have among the nation's highest abortion rates.

From a political perspective, Democratic strategists warn that emphasizing birth control gives voters a bad impression — "that Democrats are just about free love, not morality," said Rachel Laser, an analyst for the progressive think tank Third Way.

She has been urging Democrats to embrace programs aimed at helping women in crisis keep their pregnancies, in an effort to show voters that "pro-choice" does not mean "pro-abortion."

The leading Democratic presidential candidates are increasingly making that more nuanced case.

At a recent presidential forum, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York decried the failure of activists on both sides to work together to bring down the number of abortions. She repeated a mantra her husband made famous more than a decade ago: Abortion, she said, should be "safe, legal and rare."

Then Clinton paused and added deliberately: "And by rare, I mean rare."

At another forum, this one sponsored by Planned Parenthood, Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois called a woman's right to abortion "one of the most fundamental freedoms we have in this country." But he also urged alliances across ideological lines to promote initiatives that value motherhood, such as paid maternity leave.

"If the argument is [too] narrow, oftentimes we lose," Obama said.

Democrats first began field-testing this message in 2006. Candidates for governor in Ohio and Michigan made a point of talking about abortion reduction even as they supported abortion rights.

In one mailer, Ohio candidate Ted Strickland spoke of his desire to give all children "every opportunity to reach their God-given potential. This includes working together, across our differences, to reduce the need for and numbers of abortions."

Both Strickland and Michigan incumbent Jennifer Granholm won their campaigns. Exit polls showed they did better than national Democrats among weekly churchgoers — and much better among white evangelicals, who tend to be conservative on abortion.

"This approach is not going to all of a sudden bring the pro-life crowd over to the Democrats, but it creates an opening," said Eric Sapp, a political consultant who helped craft the Michigan and Ohio campaigns. With the nation so closely split, even a small boost in support for the Democrats "could reshape the political landscape," Sapp said.

The Rev. Joel Hunter symbolizes the potential.

An evangelical megachurch pastor in Florida, Hunter says he's "very strongly pro-life." He's also disillusioned: The right has spent three decades on legislation and litigation, yet one in five pregnancies still ends in abortion.

This fall, Hunter plans to urge his congregation of 10,000 to support politicians who work hard to reduce abortions — even if they don't share the goal of protecting every single one of the unborn.

"It's past time to reach out," Hunter said. "There's so much more that can be done without compromising our principles."

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THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, AUGUST 10, 2007, PAGE 19

The Justices did not say it was unconstitutional to require schoolteachers and other public employees to pay dues to a union, as anti-union groups had hoped. Rather, it said only that states that allow public sector unions may also protect the rights of dissidents.

IT IS LEGAL IN 28 STATES

Nationwide, 28 states authorize public unions to collect mandatory fees from all employees, while 22 states forbid it. Oklahoma is a right to work state.

The decision maintains the uneasy compromise that the court set in the 1970s when unions took hold in the public sector, organizing schoolteachers, firefighters, police officers and other public employees.

Anti-union activists and union officials were divided on whether the decision would prove significant.

The nation's largest teachers union said the decision "will have little or no practical impact."

Bob Chanin, general counsel for the National Education Association, said, "It is rare that I can honestly say we are pleased with a unanimous Supreme Court decision reversing our win in the court below, but this is one of those occasions."

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PRO-CHOICE

From Page 18

In a recent New York Times/CBS News poll, 41% of respondents favored stricter limits on abortion, with 23% saying it should not be permitted at all.

What are we to make of all this? Surely at a minimum that our enduring reluctance to acknowledge the complexity of the abortion issue has only prolonged and hardened the debate.

Most Americans fall somewhere between the extremes of "never" and "no problem" when it comes to abortion.

What polling can't capture and politicians won't hear is the voice of the nun I interviewed who considers herself pro-choice — and has been disciplined by her diocese as a result — because she does not think abortion is wrong for rape victims.

Or the voices of the many women I spoke to who hold far more expansive views yet call themselves pro-life.

Most people differentiate between a fetus in the early weeks of development and at nearly full term.

Would Democrats really switch parties or stay home on Election Day if their leaders began to acknowledge such distinctions?

After the last seven years, I don't

think so. Yes, the abortion rights lobby has raised a lot of money since the ban, but the statements of the Democratic candidates will cost them, too.

This issue has been very, very good to the Republican Party — and there is plenty more where that came from.

— Melinda Henneberger is author of "If They Only Listened to Us: What Women Voters Want"

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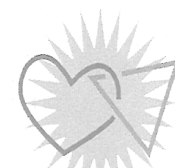


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