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GOP Lege Ignores CareerTech **The College Syndrome**

By Frosty Troy

"A society that does not value its plumbing as much as its philosophy will soon learn that neither its plumbing nor its philosophy will hold water." – The late state Sen. Bryce Baggett

Despite having the nation's finest CareerTech program, business and industry continue to cry out for people with high-tech skills while the Legislature looks the other way.

The Republican-controlled 2007 Legislature was busy cutting taxes and pouring money into pork barrel projects while starving one of Oklahoma's most valuable assets, the CareerTech system.

With a meager 4% budget increase, CareerTech continues turning away thousands of applicants for training in high-tech trades – 12,000 are on a waiting list today, including 400 drop-outs who want to come back but there is no funding.

The mean-spirited Legislature turned its back on thousands of potential high-tech students. Business and industry are in dire need of more techs in the aviation industry.

CareerTech adds \$2 billion to the state's economy annually. More than 6,300 companies have had increased profitability thanks to CareerTech assistance – providing training for 11,000 new jobs in 2006.

CareerTech's Bid Assistance Network helped Oklahoma companies secure more than \$42 million in contracts they otherwise would not have won.

To flourish in the new global economy, Oklahoma has to drop the going-to-college syndrome while adequately funding higher education for those who qualify.

The vast majority of students who don't do well in high school would be better off, in terms of future income, finding a good job rather than going to college.

As noted by state Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, Republicans – in cahoots with a Democratic governor – have been busy creating an aristocracy the past three years with massive tax cuts for the affluent.

Degrees are not required to enter rewarding jobs, including construc-

tion trades, clerical and administrative support, computer technology, auto and airplane mechanics, printing, graphics and financial services.

Union electricians, machinists, tool and die makers, and sheet-metal trades require high-demand skills. The payoff: excellent benefits, good working conditions, and annual salaries exceeding \$45,000 by age 28 [much higher with overtime].

Second, researchers who analyze jobs and talk to employers find that while today's typical job requires higher skills than in the past [when many jobs required only physical strength], the skills required for these jobs are strong high school-level skills.

They include math, reading, and writing at a ninth-grade level, not college-level skills.

For those who get no college degree, a rise of one letter grade in their high school GPA [from C to B] means a 13% earnings gain at age 28.

That's almost as much as the pay differential associated with a bachelor's degree, which is just over 14% more than students without a college degree.

Employers say in many jobs non-

academic skills [timeliness, diligence, and social competence] are vital. For many academic low-achieving high school students, getting a good job after high school can be more lucrative than trying to earn a degree.

Only 14% of students with C averages or lower in high school earn a college degree [B.A. or A.A. Associates Degree]. Of these low-GPA high school students, those who do complete a B.A. will typically earn 4.3% more than students without a college degree.

This is less than one-third the extra earnings that the typical college graduate enjoys. Those with low high school GPAs who earn an A.A. will typically earn 7.2% less than high school graduates with no college degree.

Their ability to find out about these jobs, prepare for them, and get placed in them depends a lot on the support they get from the Legislature.

Currently, about 9% of work-bound high school graduates get jobs after graduation through school-based job placement, mostly from vocational teachers. These students have 17% higher earnings by age 28 than students who find their own jobs after

high school.

School-based job placement helps more blacks and females than white males, so it helps students who normally have the greatest difficulties in the labor market.

Forbes magazine lists Oklahoma 16th nationally for low business costs, 40th lowest for labor costs. Yet the state has too few high-tech jobs.

Forbes notes that Oklahoma lost 1,059 high-tech jobs between 2004-05 but for those remaining [37,700] the average wage was \$48,796.

The average tech industry wage is 86% more than the average U.S. private sector wage.

In fact, in 48 cyberstates [including Oklahoma] the average high-tech wage is at least 50% more than the average private sector wage. In 10 cyberstates this differential is over 90%.

Forbes reports that Oklahoma ranks with California, Massachusetts and New Jersey in the average salary for a high-tech position approaching salary and benefits of \$100,000 a year.

Where was the State Chamber when CareerTech was being mauled? How many editorial pages expressed outrage?

True lesson of the new labor market is this: For many of the skilled jobs in the new economy, what non-college students need is the CareerTech opportunity.

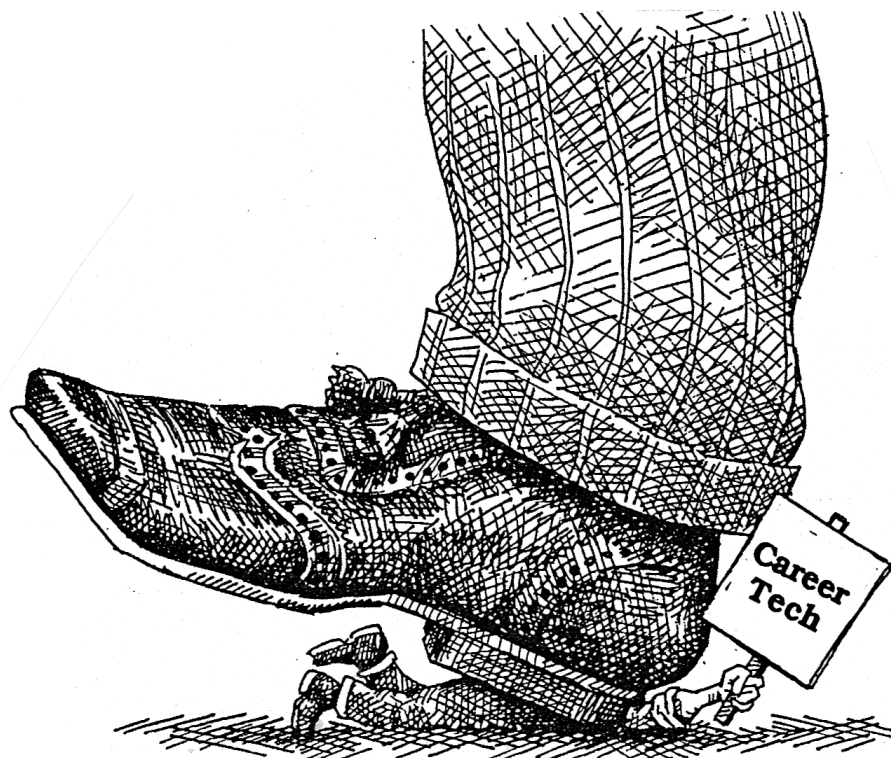
Fifty percent of high school students take CareerTech jobs. Last year 4,000 CareerTech students were enrolled in 30,000 college credit hours.

Oklahoma's quality of life ranks 34th nationally. One reason is that wages average 20% less in Oklahoma than for similar jobs in other states. An adequately funded CareerTech system would help raise that ranking.

There is no competition between lighthouses. Public education, higher education and CareerTech are all beacons lighting the way to a more robust Oklahoma.

The 2008 Legislature should get off the anti-education bandwagon and help push Oklahoma ahead in the global economy. If that means rolling back those tax cuts for the wealthy, let it happen.

Ask any philosopher or plumber.



Observations

Henry Bellmon

The Tulsa World's reporter Randy Krehbiel produced a wonderful tribute to Henry Bellmon, former two-term Republican governor and two-term U.S. senator.

He picked out 10 things that are not well known about Bellmon. The Observer will always cherish him for House Bill 1017 in 1990, pulling public education up out of the mud – turning Oklahoma into a national reform leader.

In case you missed Krehbiel's story, we share it with you:

1. He was the 10th of 13 children.
2. Among his favorite sayings: "You're not listenin' if you're talkin'."
3. Graduated from high school a year early and college in seven semesters.
5. Left home with \$5 to hitchhike around the country and returned two months later with the same \$5.
4. The most decorated combat veteran to serve as Oklahoma governor. Bellmon was presented the Silver Star and Legion of Merit for his service as a Marine tank commander in the South Pacific during World War II.
6. Proposed to wife, Shirley Osborn, on their third date.
7. The first Oklahoma governor to actively recruit black staff members.
8. Bellmon said his 12 years in the U.S. Senate were "like watching a stump rot."
9. Bellmon served briefly as national chairman of Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign but was among the first Republicans to denounce Nixon's involvement in Watergate.
10. The first Republican governor since Reconstruction elected from a southern state.

Contrary Mary

Shame on Mary Fallin. She's went to Washington as a Republican member of Congress, totally buying into the Bush war and tax cuts for the rich agenda.

As lieutenant governor, she displayed a remarkable ability to accen-

tuate the positive. Any similarity to Fallin then and Fallin now is coincidental.

Imagine defending huge tax cuts for the super rich, an unprecedented debt, and limitless off-budget spending on a war dreamed up by George W. Bush.

She talks about the strong economy – has she checked the housing market lately? She stresses new jobs created but fails to note that most are service-industry oriented.

She voted against decent funding for education and has followed the sorry Bush agenda like a puppy dog. Doesn't she read the polls?

Her chronic defamation of liberals is starting to wear thin, even in Oklahoma. Everything good about this nation is a product of liberalism. Virtually all that is negative flows from mindless, greedy conservatism. Check your history.

To say she is a disappointment puts it mildly.

Merit Pay

Oklahoma already has one superb form of merit pay for teachers – 282 teachers achieved National Board Certification in 2006. Oklahoma ranks seventh in the nation.

Oklahoma has a total of 1,569 NBCTs, which is ninth in the nation.

A total of 3.9% of all of Oklahoma teachers are NBCTs, sixth highest in the nation.

There were 7,793 new NBCTs for a total of 55,306 nationally. Oklahoma teachers had a 66% pass rate after the three years of staying in the very demanding process.

Nationally the pass rate was 40%, up from 36% last year.

Testy On Tests

In this era of experts, Lloyd Bond is one of the world's most respected experts on educational measurement



BY WASSERMAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

and testing.

He has published widely on research issues in psychometrics, and is called upon to advise many test developers.

Surprise! Surprise! Bond also is one of the most persistent and incisive critics of the testing movement. In the world of educational testing, he is unquestionably a "critical friend."

In the current issue of Carnegie Perspectives, "My Child Doesn't Test Well," Bond examines a variety of reasons why test performance may not be a valid measure of a person's competence or potential.

Although the standardized test is one of the most important inventions of the past century, it remains a special setting, fundamentally different from those contexts in which we confront the challenges of the world.

At times, it provides an uncannily accurate portrait of individual and group capacities. At other times, tests may distort and deceive. Lloyd Bond helps us think about why.

Those who worship at the shrine of test scores should do a little homework.

Censor Dies

Her name may be unfamiliar, but Norma Gabler led more rightwing censorship of public school textbooks since Germany rewrote textbooks in the '30s.

The Observer fought her from the get-go, frequently printing articles exposing her extreme rightwing bias.

She and her husband Mel had a profound influence on what a generation of children read in their school textbooks. Gabler died recently at the age of 84.

For more than 40 years, the Gablers worked to rid Texas schoolbooks of what they claimed as liberal, amoral, anti-Christian, pro-evolution biases.

Their influence extended nationwide. Texas is the country's second-largest textbook purchaser, so books with Texas-approved content were frequently sold to school districts in other states.

The fundamentalist Gablers [Mel died in 2004] set up standard criteria for reviewing textbooks on such subjects as history, literature, science and government.

For example, elementary school reading books should present "a uni-

verse that rewards virtue and punishes vice, where good and evil are not moral equivalents."

In other words, candy-coat America's checkered history – don't tell the truth about the country's dark side. Their work was a boon to home-schoolers.

Story content should also provide "diverse views on current controversial issues such as 'global warming,' feminism, or evolution," and "sensitive treatment of benefits to children of strong, stable, two-parent families."

The standards call for high school world history texts to "prevent stereotypes of whites-as-oppressors and people-of-color-as-victims."

They call on teachers to note, among other things, that "some sub-Saharan African peoples practiced 'human sacrifice'" and that "only the Christian West realized slavery was wrong and took the lead in abolishing it."

Sad to say, the Gablers' organization, Education Research Analysts, will continue their attempts at censorship.

Exhibitions

While public school students sat for standardized tests and final exams at the end of last school year, a number of schools across the country were using oral presentations – or exhibitions – to determine students' readiness to move on to the next grade, or to graduate.

While the federal No Child Left Behind Act exerts pressure on students to master standardized fill-in-the-bubble tests, a growing number of educators argue that exhibitions offer a better way to assess students' academic achievements.

During congressional hearings on the reauthorization of President Bush's NCLB education law, the focus was on the need for the federal government to support states that use performance-based assessments and on the increasing frustration that parents and teachers have with high stakes testing.

What politicians are hearing from the grassroots is that tests are driving the curriculum and narrowing the way kids learn, so there is a lot of pushback from parents and teachers. Bravo for them.

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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

Welcome to our award-winning Back to School issue, a 35-year tradition. We tell today's story of public education, warts and all. You may have 500 channels and a million websites but only the Observer tells the complete story.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's public schools, with an average graduation rate last year of 82.4%. We didn't take anybody's word for it – we asked the State Department of Education for the rate of every school district in the state.

Last minute flash: As we went to press, a Cole Hargrave poll showed 85% believe state money invested in CareerTech is a good investment and 63% rated the system excellent.

Dart: To Wal-Mart, using 19,000 unpaid youngsters 14-16 in their stores in Mexico, working as baggers for tips. Signs tell shoppers that the kids earn only on tips.

The Associated Press had good news for America. They report that as of 2005, 88% of all young adults had finished high school – up from 84% in 1980.

Laurel: To the Potter mania, sending millions of kids back to reading. Political evangelist James Dobson condemned the series because of witches and wizards, etc. Hey, Jim, check the Bible if you want real human violence.

We sadly note that Oklahoma's child wellness status has fallen from 38th to 42nd because in the last few years the Oklahoma Legislature has become less child friendly. They prefer tax cuts.

Dart: To the misguided politicians ignoring the immigration problem. Check El Paso where more than 10,000 undocumented children were enrolled last year. Public schools are legally required to take them – another unfunded federal mandate. Texas is coping with 712,000 non-English speaking students.

Rep. Dan Boren, lone Democrat, was the only House member from Oklahoma voting for HR 3042, which includes funding for public education. He voted against extending health care services to more poor children.

Laurel: To the National Education Association, which created a commission last year to study implementing merit pay but only with educator input – far ahead of rightwingers who want it to kill regular teacher pay raises.

Oklahoma had 13,827 documented cases of child abuse last year. Guess where those kids wind up? In public schools, not in private or parochial schools that claim to be doing God's work.

Dart: To AT&T, easily among the state's worst corporate citizens, for finally forking over their 2005-06 property taxes, freeing \$38.5 million for counties and schools in which they operate.

We hope 1st Congressional District teachers know that your congressman, Republican John Sullivan, voted against your education appropriation.

Laurel: To Oklahoma, one of the top states in educating special education children – 95,860 in 2007 – 15% of 634,468 students. Unfortunately, there are more than 200 special education teacher vacancies.

“A teacher's day is half bureaucracy, half crisis, half monotony and one-eighth epiphany. Never mind the arithmetic.” – Susan Ohanitan.

Dart: To the Tulsa World editorial page for carrying rightwinger Ruben Navarette's lies about the NCLB Act. Telling both sides is one thing, printing outright whoppers is something else. Don't blame educators for NCLB – they had zero input.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2020, one in four Oklahoma children will be Hispanic. The number of Hispanic children has increased 32% since 2002.



Laurel: To 70% of Americans opposed to vouchers. Any early support by intelligent people was based on ignorance of how devastating the law would be to students. Congress is rewriting it. [Gallup Poll]

Beware the fear mongers. The percentage of students taking advanced math and science courses is unprecedented, up 45% in chemistry, 33.4% in physics, 36.6% in advanced biology, 20.7% in trigonometry. [Education Week, 3.22.07]

Dart: To textbook publishers cooking the books on American history – emphasizing only the positive. A poll reveals that 65% of Americans want to read both the good and bad. The OU Press is coming out with a no-holds-barred state history book.

Republicans chronically bemoan the fact that some students have to take remedial courses in college. Time magazine's survey shows that if remedial courses had been forbidden, 600,000 students would have been denied admittance last year – 29% of freshmen.

Laurel: To Alaskan Judge Sharon Gleason for ruling that it is unconstitutional to force students to pass a single exit exam to graduate. Somebody who can talk slow enough should inform Oklahoma GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill.

Now that most Americans know how NCLB works, 70% are opposed. A whopping 71% prefer funding improvements in the existing public school system. Even the likes of co-sponsor Sen. Ted Kennedy say it needs rewriting.

Dart: To columnist Cal Thomas, ex-Jerry Falwell mouthpiece, claiming money isn't the answer to what ails public education. The U.S. ranks 22nd among 30 industrial nations in teacher salaries, and public education faces a multi-billion NCLB shortfall this year.

One of the worst bills killed in the 2007 legislative session was the ABCTE bill [dubbed the Anybody Can Teach Everything bill] that would have permitted online certification.

Laurel: To the school districts and OEA for pursuing the legislative report that schools are underfunded by \$900 million a year. The state Supreme Court agreed but booted the case, saying the Legislature could legally underfund its own mandates.

Here is a scary thought: By 2015 America will need 280,000 new math and science teachers. Don't count on females – their number has dropped from 50% of graduates going into teaching to 15%.

Dart: To 68% of Republicans who deny the theory of evolution. In their case, maybe it hasn't started. Fifty-seven percent of Democrats believe in evolution. [Gallup Poll]

Let's hear it for McAlester public schools! They have ruled out nose studs, short skirts, tank tops, sagging pants and dyed hair. Only ears may be pierced. The public should demand that every school have a similar dress code.

Laurel: To Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, for exposing the fact that Speaker Lance Cargill's so-called 100 Ideas received \$100,000 in state money from the Commerce Department. The AG has been asked to rule on it.

The average public school teacher spent \$1,802 out of personal funds to help poor children, with \$826 going for classroom supplies. Know any other profession that donates so much to needy children? [National School Supply & Equipment Association poll]

Dart: To the U.S. Supreme Court for allowing re-segregation of public schools. The federal National Center for Education Statistics reports children from low-income families attending schools that are 75% minority are badly under-performing in reading.

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was named the National Education Association's 2007 Friend of Education for 35 years of fighting for public schools and school employees.

Laurel: To Tulsa World Associate Editor Julie DelCour for her excellent report on women in prison in Oklahoma – first in the nation, 10 times the national average. The sad part? They have 377 children.

Don't tell the fundamentalists, but the billion federal dollars spent thus far on abstinence-only sex education is a total failure, admitted by the U.S. Department of Education.

The football season hasn't officially kicked off and we've already fumbled: In the last issue, we incorrectly “promoted” Stuart Jolly to the state Senate. Of course, the actual senator is Clark Jolley, R-Edmond.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

As a veteran English teacher, I need to speak some ugly truths you will never hear from politicians or school officials: this country is full of clueless, disengaged parents who can't or won't control their kids.

Many of my students shamelessly admit they never study, do homework or read books for fun. Meanwhile, I spend a lot of instructional time shutting them up, waking them up and telling them to put away their cell phones.

I love my job and my students, but I'm tired of taking all the blame for education's problems. Everyone needs to be held accountable.

Stephen Powers
Fort Worth

Editor, The Observer:

The dart to Benedict XVI [Aug. 10 edition] is quite unfair. He is not "returning" the church to the 17th Century. In the spirit of Vatican II inclusiveness, he has re-authorized the use of the 1962 mass. This will ease the need of many who were traumatized by the sudden introduction of the mass of Paul VI after Vatican II. Many have felt for years that the familiarity removed of the old mass has caused spiritual anxiety. It is not going to be the official rite. It is an act of inclusiveness and diversity!

As to the "true path" to salvation, Vatican II acknowledges that there is truth in all religions. The church would not dream of discounting a Ghandi because he was not Catholic. The Catholic Church believes that the holiness of God is found in all paths that "sincerely seek truth." But for those who have come to believe in the Catholic faith, yes, it is their true way. No exclusion intended.

J.T. Bryant
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I have observed that plenty of children get left behind. The needs of students with no hope of passing proficiency tests and those who will certainly pass are largely ignored. Pity the poor child who just barely fails. He is prodded with extra tutoring morning, noon and night in the hope that his scores will cross into the light.

As a 33-year veteran music teacher, I also notice how the arts and other subjects are sometimes disregarded. We are short-changing the multiple intelligences that our children possess.

Jay Singer
Pepper Pike, OH

Editor, The Observer:

My family and I watched in amazement this morning - after a sleepless night wondering if our own place would flood - as OHP's little Ranger helicopter was called on to do difficult rescues of folks caught in the flooding up around Kingfisher.

Where was the National Guard and its big Blackhawks and Chinooks?

The rescue effort with the relatively tiny Ranger was harrowing - one at a time, with both crewman and soggy rescue-ee clinging to the left landing skid. No cable lift. Obviously a tenuous balance of CG / fuel load and enough crew to deal with the job.

With as much water as we have in Oklahoma, I wonder why we don't have full-time, rescue helicopters of adequate size [OK, if not the huge Super Stallions like those used by the Navy and Coast Guard, at least Blackhawks!] with specially trained crews to handle such situations?

Meanwhile, with the Guard under pressure from Washington, I can't help but wonder if our commitments in Iraq haven't affected local disaster response.

Tom Elmore
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

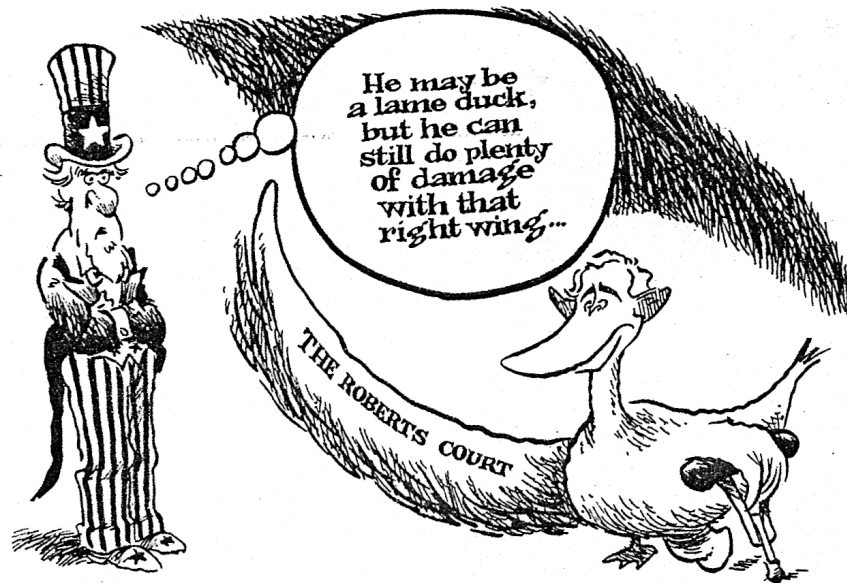
Thanks for the good story in your latest edition on funding [or lack of it] for the Ethics Commission. As you noted we have even less for office operation this year than last, and may not even have enough for postage by the end of the year. In the meantime the Senate has doubled its staff - ironically because of the even split. Interesting question: if there is no even split after the '08 elections, will all these new people be fired?

We are looking at all our options on funding. But in the meantime, if people ask me why the Ethics Commission is not prosecuting more cases, I'm going to give them the phone numbers of the speaker and the presidents pro tem.

John Raley
Ponca City

Editor, The Observer:

As a public school teacher and mother of a Marine, I read with equal interest about NCLB and "One Day in Iraq." It is ironic that I will lose my job if I fail to meet President George W. Bush's NCLB benchmarks for progress in my class, yet his Administration squanders our tax dollars and children's lives and tells us we have no right to expect accountability and



progress with its protracted war in Iraq.

Helen Logan-Tackett
Fullerton, CA

Editor, The Observer:

You asked if there is too much reading and math in grades one through six. Children need to master the Three Rs [reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic] to fully comprehend and appreciate history, science and all other subjects. Those who don't will truly be left behind.

Dennis Hurst
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

It is unthinkable that OG&E would try to build this plant, given the keen public awareness of CO2 emissions as a cause of global warming.

It is unthinkable that the public would allow more mercury contamination of our environment - air, water, and fish we eat. I suspect we will see more and more studies linking the epidemic of autism [and resultant educational, societal costs] to mercury pollution.

For too long we consumers of electricity have pretended that the only cost of what we use - or waste - is the dollar amount on our utility bill. But more than utility bills is involved. Many of the costs of coal - to health and the environment - are off-loaded onto the public outside the utility bill. The whole picture needs to be considered when comparing coal with clean renewables. In a complete picture, coal is not cheap.

There should be more talk of conserving electricity. A responsible innovation by our utilities would be to introduce rate structures that encourage residential, business and industrial users to conserve and to shift their electric usage away from peak hours.

For electric utilities to ask ratepayers to lock further into dirty coal appears unscrupulous. An informed and rational financial investor wouldn't fund a coal plant.

Frances Cervantes
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

You have done great job identifying steps to improve the supply side of education, but what about the demand side? In how many schools is being smart seen as un-cool? In how many schools are the real heroes those who excel in sports rather than academics?

How many parents are not involved enough in their children's education? If we can inspire a greater love

of learning - not for test results but just for a high regard for achievement - there would be no need for the NCLB legislation.

Bob Littlefield
Provincetown, MA

Editor, The Observer:

NCLB does need a major overhaul. Among many other proposals, the Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB stands out for its power to attract widespread support.

The statement has been endorsed by 129 national education, civil rights, disability, civic and labor organizations, representing millions of Americans.

The groups recommend that Congress replace arbitrary and unrealistic "adequate yearly progress" requirements with reasonable expectations for improvement, reduce testing mandates, ensure the use of multiple measures instead of onesize-fits-all tests, remove counterproductive sanctions and greatly increase funding.

The NCLB should require and provide support for schools to take reasonable steps to improve educational quality.

Montgomery Noland, EdD
Kansas City, MO

Editor, the Observer:

As a teacher and parent, I give No Child Left Behind [NCLB] a failing grade. There is no way to fix a law that operates under the flawed assumption that tests rather than teachers should govern curriculum.

Testing is simply a tool for measuring learning in the same way that a thermometer is an instrument for reading temperature.

What would happen to the health of a nation if lawmakers tried to force doctors to spend a large portion of their time taking patients' temperatures instead of practicing medicine? The reality of NCLB is that it allows few children to get ahead.

Lynn Howell
Dallas

Editor, The Observer:

Why do some educators believe that memorization is the key to intelligence? What about balancing the potential of the right brain with the left? Have developing creativity and encouraging imaginative thinking been put on the shelf? What about the need to encourage integrity?

The narrow-minded definition of what constitutes a bright human being is certainly altering the nature of the broader learning experience.

Al Beck
Monroe City, MO

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Frosty's Notebook

S.O.S.

S.O.S. – Save Our Schools! This is no false alarm. Public education is under withering extremist attack in Oklahoma and across the nation.

From the vicious staff at the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs to newspapers that will print anything that comes over the transom, the assaults go on.

Now that the Oklahoma Legislature has fallen into Republican hands, the war against the schools is out in the open. Leader of this attack is GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill who announced there will be no more teacher pay raises.

The reform facade is another misnomer – “merit pay.” There is nothing wrong with merit pay when it is done correctly, but that ignores the fact that Oklahoma teachers rank 49th in salary and are \$1,500 below the regional average.

Cargill previously supported getting teachers to the regional average, but that was before he put on the uniform of a little dictator.

This “merit pay” moniker ranks up there with TABOR [Taxpayers Bill Of Rights] and the 65% Solution. Both are cleverly-named relentless attacks on public education. Because you put lipstick on a pig doesn't mean she's Miss America.

We can give you 10 reasons why public education – warts and all – should be preserved.

1. An educated populace is the cornerstone of democracy. In a democratic society, the well-being of the nation depends on the decisions of an educated, informed electorate.

2. Education reduces costs to taxpayers. Every dollar spent to keep a child in school reduces the future costs of welfare, prison and intervention services that correlate so highly with school dropouts. It costs far less to educate a child now than to support a teen parent or a repeat offender in the future. Education expenditures help secure the future of all citizens.

3. Public schools are the only schools that must meet the needs of all students. Public schools serve children with physical, emotional and mental disabilities, those who are extremely gifted and those who are learning challenged, and everything in between.

4. Public schools foster interaction and understanding among people of different ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. They are a true melting pot.

5. The future support of our aging population depends on strong public schools.



In 1954 there were 17 workers to pay the Social Security cost for each retiree. By 1996, there were only three for each retiree. The productivity of these three workers will likely depend on the strength of our public school system.

6. More than 95% of our future jobs will require at least a high school education. An educated workforce will be essential.

7. The nation pays a high price for poorly educated workers. The cost of retraining and remediation to prepare a worker for his or her tasks is paid by both employers and consumers. The process raises the price of American products and makes it more difficult for our nation to compete in the world marketplace.

8. The cost of school dropouts affects us all. Our nation loses more than \$240 billion per year in earnings and taxes that dropouts would have generated over their lifetimes. Well-supported public schools can engage all students in learning and graduate productive and competent taxpaying citizens.

9. Some say children are our nation's future. The reality is that we are their future. Their development affects all of us. Good education is not cheap, but ignorance costs far more.

10. Public education is a worthy investment of public funds. We can invest now, or we can pay later. That's the inescapable truth.

Media Matters

You watch TV in disgust and disbelief as the “news” covers car chases, grass fires and celebrity breakups while ignoring vital issues at home and abroad.

You listen to an endless stream of radio talk show hosts polarizing regular Americans. Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly are fountains of skewed facts and outright lies. CNN veered right as Fox numbers increased.

You hear pundits shouting about political horse races and poll numbers, rather than discussing hard facts. Only the Far Right is granted air time.

In Oklahoma, the Daily Disappointment editorial page is mostly one continuous Birchite diatribe.

Hope for change under a new family publisher died quickly – except they no longer bash gay people since there is now one in the family.

Check what passes for radio in Oklahoma today. If it were not for NPR, radio listeners would be adrift in a sea of talk radio morons.

There is no doubt the U.S. media is in crisis when a scientific poll commissioned by Time magazine shows journalists at the absolute bottom of the professional totem pole.

A handful of massive corporations now control most TV, radio, and newspapers. They slash newsroom budgets, cozy up to government officials in exchange for insider access, and clutter the public airwaves with cheap, mindless entertainment and faux journalism.

Thankfully, Bill Moyers is back on PBS, exposing media mogul Rupert Murdoch for what he is – a billionaire rightwing ideologue determined to undercut

balanced journalism in favor of a pro-rich philosophy.

Consider the pathetic news coverage of Oklahoma's congressional delegation – an amen corner for George Bush's war and anti-public education initiatives.

Newspapers, for example, are not hurting for money. The operating profit margin for newspapers last year was an average 19.3% – exceeded only by commercial banks [32.4%] and pharmaceuticals [24.2%].

What irony! Profits are up but circulation and network viewership are down. Most of the media have left us with an American populace that is misled and misinformed.

What's good for Big Media's bottom line – and many media outlets turn profits of up to 40% – is a disaster for the rest of us.

Nearly every political problem we face today – from the war in Iraq to eroding environmental protections, the soaring budget deficit to disappearing civil liberties, the collapse of public education to the crisis in health care – can be linked to the media's failure to ask probing questions, challenge the status quo, and display the vision and courage that the First Amendment was designed to ensure.

The mess in the media was created by government policies beginning with Ronald Reagan's presidency – monopoly broadcast licenses, subsidies, and ownership regulations – written by well-heeled media lobbyists behind closed doors. Reagan also killed the Fairness Doctrine.

We think we can't lose this country – but we can.

Raising Children

Growing up is never easy. Children, no matter what their background or financial status, need a set of basic connections to help them navigate the shoals of young adulthood.

Kids need the guidance, the time, and often the financial help of a stable, secure family. Yet the gravest tragedy in America today is the fact that the country is experiencing the sorriest parenting in its history.

How can the children make it if they don't have good parenting, and connections to wider communities that provide access to other mentoring adults and real-life options?

Too often parents are parking the kids at school as though all of life's experience is gleaned in that six hours in the classroom.

Of course students need access to education and experiences that provide them with a foundation of learning, life skills, and credentials that can help them gain the knowledge and confidence they need to succeed. Without a strong home life, it becomes extremely difficult.

Currently, it is estimated that there are 3.8 million youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who are neither employed nor in school – roughly 15% of all young adults.

Since 2000 alone, the ranks of these non-engaged young adults grew by

700,000, a 19% increase. For many of these young people – America's “disconnected youth” – the transition to adulthood is not a time of anticipation and possibility; it is a time of fear and frustration.

A significant number of these 3.8 million young people have neither the skills, experience, education, nor confidence to successfully transition to adulthood.

Bill Cosby has caught hell for addressing the parenting crisis in the African-American community where 70% of all births are out of wedlock. But it is by no means a problem confined to a single segment of America – ask any teacher.

America's declining birthrate has left 60% of adults with no connection with public education – yet every poll shows a strong majority of all Americans believes education should be the country's top priority.

The biggest challenge facing public education is engaging parents. Education isn't just part of a day in a classroom. Successful education is a compact between school, home and community.

**BLIND FAITH IN BAD LEADERSHIP
IS NOT PATRIOTISM**

Sooner ACT Increase Beats U.S. Average

There is good news from state Superintendent Sandy Garrett and State Higher Education Chancellor Glen D. Johnson – the average ACT composite score in Oklahoma has risen from 20.5 to 20.7

This is the state's third consecutive increase on the college entrance exam. Oklahoma's increase on the ACT outpaced the gains the nation made on the exam in 2007.

In 2006, the average ACT composite score in Oklahoma was 20.5; it was 20.4 in 2005. The nation's average composite score on the ACT was 21.2 for 2007.

"We're very encouraged that our students show clear progress, posting a 20.7 in 2007, our Centennial year," Garrett said. "As we continue to implement the Achieving Classroom Excellence Act and push for more time on task-time reform, our focus is on college and work-readiness and surpassing the national average on every educational indicator, including the ACT."

TAKING PRIDE IN INCREASED ACT SCORE

"We can all be proud of the improvements in the test scores," said Johnson, higher education chancellor. "This comes as a result of the high level of cooperation between our secondary schools and higher education, particularly in the area of college preparation.

"The Oklahoma Educational Planning and Assessment System [OK EPAS] provides nearly 500 school districts with two assessments that assist about 85,000 eighth and ninth graders prepare for the ACT each year.

"The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs [GEAR UP] program provides additional college prep assistance for educators, students and their parents. Our long-term commitment to these programs is paying off."

Oklahoma improved all of its sub scores on the ACT in 2007 and came close to reaching the national averages in both English and reading. The average English sub score for the state rose to 20.5 from 20.3; math rose to 19.8 from 19.7; reading increased to 21.3 from 21.1; and science rose to 20.5 from 20.4.

MINORITY TEST TAKERS STILL LAGGING

Black, Hispanic and American Indian students in Oklahoma out-performed their peers nationally, though their performance was significantly below both the state and nation's overall composite score.

Garrett said that as Oklahoma enters the high-stakes testing arena for students to earn high-school diplomas, she was optimistic more students and parents would see the value of taking math and science during the senior year of high school.

She also said for students to post college-ready scores on the ACT, families must encourage their students to take a math curriculum that, at an absolute minimum, ends with Algebra II and a science curriculum that includes biology, chemistry and physics.

"I cannot stress enough how critical it is that students make the most of every year in high school and undertake a rigorous course of study," Garrett said.

"Moreover, secondary principals and counselors must make certain their

Cargill Pushes Ruse To Punish Teachers

Obviously still fuming over teachers supporting Gov. Brad Henry's veto of the sorry Republican budget in the 2007 Legislature, Speaker Lance Cargill decided it was payback time.

He held a press conference at the Capitol to tout a study on merit pay. He had previously announced there would be no more across-the-board pay raises.

Like the Taxpayer Bill of Rights [TABOR] and the 65% Solution, merit pay sounds good – who could be against a little something extra for teachers doing an outstanding job?

That isn't the direction Cargill and his House lemmings are headed. If perhaps four or five teachers in an elementary school get merit pay, the rest get nothing. Cargill seeks to freeze Oklahoma teachers at 49th in the nation.

Cargill had previously supported taking Oklahoma teachers to the regional average – they are dead last in the region by \$1,500.

CARGILL WAS MIFFED AT THE TEACHERS

When Cargill didn't get his way on the budget – proposing a measly \$600 pay hike while cutting taxes again – he went after the teachers. They supported Gov. Henry's \$1,000 pay raise and that's what they got.

Touting openness and transparency in state government, Cargill's thugs blocked an Oklahoma Education Association vice president from attending his press conference.

His spin on merit pay is typically Republican – in the words of Grover Norquist, reduce government to the point where you can drown what's left in the bathtub.

A bevy of math, science, special education and foreign language teachers have been fleeing to surrounding states that pay far better than Oklahoma.

One example: Oklahoma starts the school year 200 special education teachers short.

"We need bold reforms to start rewarding teachers for success in the classroom, so that our best and hardest-working teachers are paid for their achievements," Cargill said.

THIS IS THE LIKELY SCENARIO

That's pure bull. He has declared war on public education. With 57 Republicans out of 101 House members, he is likely to win legislative passage since the



courses adhere to the state's Priority Academic Student Skills and contain the rigor needed for students to be successful not only on the ACT, but to pass the state's end-of-instruction exams in Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, English II, English III, U.S. History and Biology I. Watered-down courses serve no one and no purpose."

THOUSANDS EARN COLLEGE CREDITS

"We continue to see significant increases in the number of students who are earning college credit while they are still in high school," Johnson said. "In the last school year, 9,442 Oklahoma students were concurrently enrolled in college courses.

"Our recent cooperative alliances between community colleges and CareerTech centers resulted in nearly 3,800 college course enrollments. These numbers are continuing to grow and will have a tremendous impact on the state in years to come."

Oklahoma's average composite score is the second highest in the Southern region [trailing Virginia, which tested only 18% of graduating seniors, and tying Kentucky and Tennessee].

Both Texas and Arkansas have an average composite score of 20.5, though Arkansas tests a higher percentage of students.

The percentage of Caucasian test-takers in Oklahoma has declined by 8% since 2003 [from 70% of all test-takers to 62%].

In contrast, the number of Hispanic test-takers has climbed from 3% to 5%; the percentage of both American Indian and Asian American test-takers has increased by 1%; and the percentage of Black test-takers has stayed 7%.

The percentage of test-takers in Oklahoma who report their ethnicity as "Other/No Response" has doubled since 2003 and they now comprise 12% of all Oklahoma ACT test-takers. Their average composite score for 2007 was 21.2, rising six-tenths of a point in just one year.

Note: Per the Achieving Classroom Excellence law, beginning with the Class of 2012, students must pass four out of seven end-of-instruction exams in order to earn a high school diploma from any public Oklahoma high school.

equally divided Senate will probably go along. The Senate Democrats went over to the dark side in this year's session.

The bill will hit Gov. Henry's desk. Will he sign it? Who knows?

"We fund our schools with tax dollars, and taxpayers demand accountability. More money alone won't solve our problems in education," Cargill said.

Did any reporter point out that Oklahoma is 47th in what it spends per pupil? Yet according to the annual Quality Counts report, Oklahoma has among the best prepared teachers in America.

So why would Cargill stand there and deliberately mislead the people of Oklahoma? It's not the first time. Remember when he promised no more tax cuts at the beginning of this year's session? Millions in state bills went unpaid but taxes were cut again.

Or when he promised openness and transparency in state government?

When the 44 House Democrats voted to sustain Henry's veto of the sorry GOP state budget, Cargill reacted by ordering every Democratic bill in committee killed.

The issue is not merit pay but the fact that a little tinhorn dictator has set out to punish Oklahoma's outstanding public school teachers.

Education Is The Difference

Oklahoma's definition of recidivism is returning to prison within three years of being released:

Oklahoma recidivism rate – 26.2%

Recidivism rate of inmate earning GED in prison – 20%

Recidivism rate with some college studies in prison – 6%

Recidivism rate after earning two-year degree in prison – 2%

Oklahoma has 23,894 inmates in state and private prisons. Last year 599 inmates were enrolled in college courses.

Prison literacy rate – 60% of inmates enter the Oklahoma prison system with lower than 8th grade education.

– Oklahoma Department of Corrections

Oklahoma Ranking Versus Other States

Among those grading public education is the Institute For America's Future. Their statistics are accurate but they tell only part of the story.

Every demographic study ever made reveals that on average kids living in poverty [especially minorities] are from single-parent families. To our shame, Oklahoma is one of the nation's leaders in both categories. Here are the cold, hard statistics:

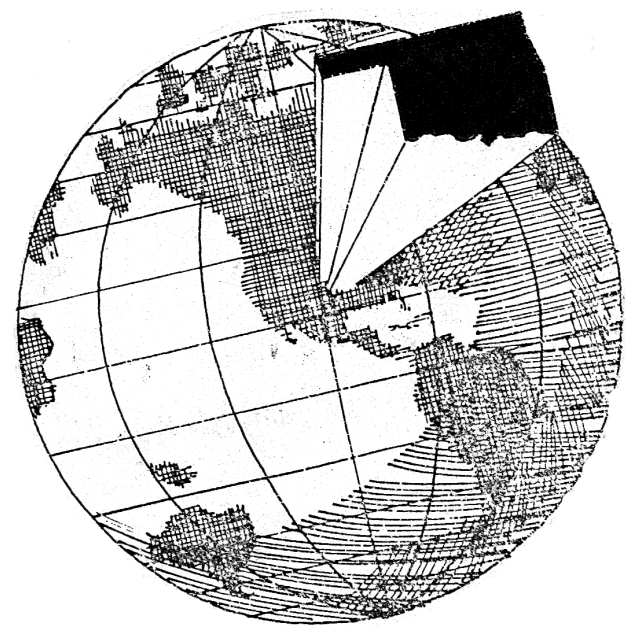
- 17% of low-income 4th graders are proficient in reading compared to 38% of non-poor students. Oklahoma ranks 16th in the nation on this measure.
- 13% of African-American 11th graders are proficient in reading compared to 34% of white students. Oklahoma ranks 5th out of 40 states that had data available on this measure.
- 17% of Latino 4th graders are proficient in reading compared to 34% of white students. Oklahoma ranks 8th out of 36 states with data available on this measure.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- 16% of 3-year-olds participate in state-sponsored pre-kindergarten or the federal Head Start program. Oklahoma ranks 18th in the nation on this measure.
- 82% of 4-year-olds participate in such programs. Oklahoma ranks 15th in the nation on this measure.
- The state's high-school graduation rate is over 80%. Oklahoma ranks 8th in the nation on this measure.
- 37% of high-school graduates are academically ready for college. Oklahoma ranks 12th in the nation on this measure.
- 50% of high-school graduates enroll in college the fall after they graduate. Oklahoma ranks 42nd in the nation on this measure, a stinging rebuke to a tax-cutting Legislature.
- 42% of college freshmen earn a bachelor's degree within six years. Oklahoma ranks 45th in the nation on this measure. See the next statistic.
- 71.6% of Oklahoma's grants to college students are need-based. Oklahoma ranks 34th among the 48 states and the District of Columbia for which data are available on this measure.

ACCESSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- 20% of the average family income is required to pay for annual community



college expenses after accounting for financial aid. Oklahoma ranks 11th in the nation on this measure.

- 23% of the average family income is required to pay for annual expenses at a four-year public university, after accounting for financial aid. Oklahoma ranks 6th in the nation on this measure.

PARTICIPATION IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

- 25% of youth go unsupervised after school. Oklahoma ranks 28th in the nation on this measure.
- 6% participate in after-school programs. Oklahoma ranks 48th in the nation on this measure, thanks to a Republican-dominated Legislature which refused adequate funding, preferring to cut taxes again.

TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS

- 26% of middle- and high-school classes in core academic subjects are taught by instructors who lack at least a college minor in their subject. Oklahoma ranks 29th in the nation on this measure.
 - 28% of middle- and high-school classes in core academic subjects in high-poverty schools are led by teachers without at least a college minor in their subject. Oklahoma ranks 10th of the 37 states with data available on this measure.
- Tragically, the Republican-dominated Legislature has refused to restore Gov. Henry Bellmon's House Bill 1017 reforms, including a requirement that teachers majored in their subject matter.

Task Force Studies School Financing

At last a legislative task force has been authorized to examine how state funds are distributed to Oklahoma public schools – that's after Gov. Brad Henry signed Senate Bill 925 into law.

Sen. Clark Jolley is principal author of the legislation, co-authored by Rep. Ken Miller.

Jolley said he appreciated the governor's support of the study.

"This is long overdue. It's been about two decades since anyone took an in-depth look at the school funding formula," said Jolley, R-Edmond. "We need to determine whether it is efficient, fair, and whether it could be simplified."

Miller said the School Funding Formula Task Force will consist of eight members including educators and business people appointed by the governor and legislative leaders.

Jolley said one major concern is that fast-growing districts currently do not have any means of obtaining additional funds needed to prepare for that growth.

"I represent Edmond, and in the past three years we've added three new elementary schools with another one on the way," Jolley said.

"Districts like ours need funding now to prepare for the influx of students by hiring additional faculty and addressing capital needs, but that really can't be done under the current system. It's an important issue we need to consider."

Under SB 925, members of the task force must be appointed by Aug. 31, with the first meeting convening by Sept. 30.

All proceedings of the task force will be subject to the Open Meeting and Open Records Act.

Music Is Taking NCLB Back Seat

Editor's Note: James South made the case for music education in the public schools to the commission studying effects of NCLB. His writing appeared in the winter issue of Oklahoma Music.

I am writing on behalf of OMEA, the Oklahoma Music Educators Association. I urge you to take action to stem the reduction of instructional time for music in our schools.

In Oklahoma, as in other states across the country, music programs have had time cut, enrollments have dropped as scheduling has changed, and some programs been eliminated altogether in the last few years.

Music is listed in the No Child Left Behind Act as a core subject.

However, because it is not a tested and reported subject, many administrators ignore the importance of music education and increase instructional time in the tested subjects.

This is a very shortsighted strategy because students who have studied music show increases in test scores. In addition, by studying music they improve their understanding of themselves as creative humans, and they study one of the arts that define our culture.

Elliot Eisner from Stanford University has said, "One of the first things that work as the arts develop is a sense of relationship, that nothing stands alone ... every aspect of the work affects every other aspect ... the arts teach the ability to engage the imagination as a source of content ... they are among the most powerful ways we become human, and that is reason enough to earn them a place in our schools."

If we are to remain leaders in the world, our education system must reflect not only factual learning, but creativity as well. It is in this realm that music and the other arts excel.

We are proud of the system of music education that has developed in the United States. As Americans, we may study how the Germans and the Japanese teach

science and math, but they look to us as the model for music education.

With the negative effects of the NCLB act, we have weakened the very part of our system that was strong to begin with.

To quote Eisner again, "The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important. With the NCLB, it is apparent that some in our government don't believe the arts are important."

I urge the Commission [studying effects of NCLB] in the strongest possible terms to immediately institute safeguards to protect music education [along with the other arts].

We already practice accountability in music education and we do it very well. Allow us to continue leading the world in music education.

The Arts Are Important

Research shows that young people who participate in the arts for at least three hours on three days each week for one full year or more are:

- 4 times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.
 - 3 times more likely to be elected to class office.
 - 4 times more likely to participate in a math and science fair.
 - 3 times more likely to win an award for school attendance.
 - 4 times more likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem.
- In addition, young arts participants as compared with their peers are likely to:
- Read for pleasure nearly twice as often.
 - Participate in youth groups nearly four times as frequently.
 - Perform community service nearly twice as often.
- Source: Dr. Shirley Brice Heath, Stanford University, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Underage Drinking Is A State Epidemic

There is no better time than today to remind adults of the consequences of providing or allowing underage drinking in their house or on their property.

Jessica Hawkins, a prevention specialist at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has words of warning for parents.

An Edmond couple, who allegedly hosted a recent party where alcohol was served to minors, was arrested under the city's "social host" ordinance and could face possible fines and jail time.

"Underage drinking is our state's number one drug problem, and adults need to be aware of that and what their role may be in contributing to the problem," Hawkins said.

SOME COMMUNITIES TAKING ACTION

"Several communities across the state have ordinances related to underage drinking home parties. Adults need to be cognizant of laws that hold them accountable for either providing or allowing underage drinking ..."

A 2006 Oklahoma Prevention Needs Assessment Survey found that 76% of high school seniors have consumed alcohol, as have 67% of 10th graders. More than half of all eighth graders and 28% of sixth graders have consumed alcohol.

Of those adolescents who consumed alcohol, 63% of seniors, 50% of sophomores, 34% of eighth graders and 23% of sixth graders obtained the alcohol from someone age 21 or older.

What is even more surprising, Hawkins said, is that many of these kids drank alcohol at home with their parents' permission. This is occurring at a very young age.

SIXTH GRADERS DRINK WITH PARENTS' OK

"Of sixth graders who said they had drunk alcohol, 26% of them said the last time they drank alcohol, they drank it at home with their parents' permission,"

Payne County Democrats Offer Scholarships

Increasing tuition, gasoline, food and other living expenses hit cash-strapped college and career technology students especially hard, leaving some with no choice but to drop out of school

At Oklahoma State University, however, deserving Young Democrats are eligible to apply for thousands of dollars in scholarships sponsored by the Payne County Democrats.

"In 2002, the Payne County Democrats started the scholarship program to reward and inspire young members of the Democratic Party – reward them for their past and ongoing accomplishments as Democrats and inspire them to continue, knowing that they are appreciated by the Democrats in the county where they are living as they go to school," said Kathy Huston, Democratic Party Third District secretary.

STUDENTS MUST MEET CRITERIA

Huston said to be eligible, students must be registered Democrats, have a good grade point average, and have completed at least 24 academic credit hours at OSU.

The extent to which they have been involved in Democratic activities, their

Sooners Have A Message For GOP

Oklahomans solidly support public education, according to a new annual statewide survey of adults by the Oklahoma Commission on Educational Administration [OCEA].

OCEA surveyed teacher pay, which remains a high priority for Oklahomans. When asked, "How serious a problem would you say each of the following is in the public school in your community?" more than 75% said adequate teacher pay is a very or fairly serious problem.

Asked about favoring or opposing increasing funding for various school issues, 89.8% favor raising teacher salaries to the regional average.

Almost 93% favor increasing funding for adequate classroom supplies and materials.

Raising per pupil funding to the regional average received an 89.2% favorable response. [Are House Republicans listening?]

When asked if the Oklahoma Legislature is providing adequate funding for education, 61% said no. [Are House Republicans listening?]

The Oklahoma Teachers Retirement System is the third most underfunded education retirement system in America. When asked about it, 82.6% of respondents favor raising TRS funding to the same level as other state-funded pension systems.

Other results:

- 57.2% oppose the use of vouchers for private schools.
- 65.8% oppose labeling schools as failing even if a majority of students pass the skills proficiency test.
- 50.4% of the respondents oppose consolidating schools with 400 or fewer students, and 60.4% oppose consolidating their own schools.
- 67% favor paying health insurance for teachers' children.

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she said. "This held true for 20% of eighth graders, 16% of 10th graders and 13% of seniors."

Some adults hold to a false belief that youth are safer if drinking alcohol at home or on an adult's property, Hawkins said. But, for minors, drinking alcohol is never safe.

"Some people falsely assume that the only consequence of underage drinking is drinking and driving," she said. "They forget about the effects on the developing brain, sexual assault, pedestrian deaths, suicides, unintentional injuries or a greatly increased risk for lifetime alcohol dependence. There is no safe way for underage people to drink."

Hawkins said adults need to "shatter the myth" that it's no big deal to drink.

"As adults, we have to reject the fallacy that kids are 'going to drink anyway,'" she said. "By ignoring it, condoning it or providing it, adults are contributing to the problem."

circumstances of need, and their community and state services or activities are also considered.

The Payne County Democrats use a scoring system to evaluate applicants who must submit short essay answers for consideration.

BOTH ACTIVE IN THE PARTY

In addition to being one of the originators of Payne County Democrats' scholarship program, Huston has served as communications coordinator, maintained the county activists list and works as the liaison to the OSU Young Democrats.

She and her husband Jim ensure that two fund raisers – the fall "Brayfest" and the spring "Diamond Donkey" – became annual events without fail, funding party activities, donations to candidates and scholarships.

A two-term chair of the Payne County Democrats and former county secretary, James L. [Jim] Huston began actively volunteering in 1998.

He is a Regents Professor of history at Oklahoma State University and the author of five books, 30 journal articles and other publications.

"I was raised a Republican in Moline, IL, on the Mississippi," he said, smiling, "but a bachelor's degree in history converted me firmly to the 'good side.'"

New Retirement Law Is Challenged

A new law designed to encourage teachers to work past retirement age will likely be challenged in court.

Oklahoma Teachers' Retirement System Executive Secretary Tommy Beavers predicted the lawsuit.

The new law is dubbed The Education Employees Service Incentive Plan, also known as EESIP or the Wear Away Plan.

It was passed in special session in 2006 as House Bill 1179XX.

The law permits teachers who work beyond retirement age to move years worked prior to 1995 to a higher salary bracket, upping their retirement benefit, Beavers explained.

For each year a member works past normal retirement age – past age 62 or whenever age plus total years of service equal 80 – two years of service performed prior to 1995 may be moved to a higher salary.

The change in formula can make a big difference in retirement income. Consider this:

A member previously eligible for benefits of \$30,600 annually, or \$2,550 per month, could bring in \$34,600 or \$2,883 per month using the new formula. Adding one more year of service could bring that member's retirement benefit up to \$39,680 a year.

The new law applies only to members who joined the Teachers' Retirement System prior to July 1, 1995, targeting the benefit to those who have spent the most time in the system.

An as yet unnamed teacher who joined the system after that date is protesting the 1995 cutoff through the administrative process.

The teacher's lawyer has indicated that a lawsuit will be filed in district court challenging the law, said Beavers.

PUBLIC FORUM

GOP's Double-Talk On Taxes, Spending

By Brent Wilcox

I'll try to keep this short and to the point. Republicans really irritate me. I've read and heard Oklahoma Republicans bitch and moan about the size of our state government. The Oklahoma state budget is now at \$7 billion a year. Yes, that is a lot of money.

But consider what our government does with all that money. The largest chunk goes to our state's children: education and health care. That is very important for Oklahoma's future.

We don't want criminals on the street, so the state pays for law enforcement and to keep the convicted behind bars.

Not nearly enough, in my opinion, goes to improve and maintain our infrastructure: roads, bridges, public water systems, and government buildings.

I believe Oklahoma should be investing more dollars in all of the above, as well as in many other areas.

While Oklahoma Republicans continually complain that our state's budget is too large, that our government spends too much on Oklahoma and Oklahomans, they defend George W. Bush and what he spends in Iraq.

How much he, along with a rubber-stamp-GOP-led Congress for five years, has grown the federal government in size and waste is a whole other topic.



The Bush Administration spends \$3 billion a WEEK in Iraq. Bush is spending in 16 days on Iraq what the state of Oklahoma spends in a full year on all of our state's agencies, employees, programs, responsibilities.

Remember this fact every time an Oklahoma Republican says we need to cut our state's budget.

And make them explain and defend their party's priorities.

- The author lives in Minco

'No Damn Summer Camp To Help Kids'

By Karen Webb

My grand nephew has decided to join the military. His mother was yelling at him Christmas that if he didn't join she was putting him out on his own. He didn't even graduate high school until May.

He leaves for Georgia in late August and I am really enraged by [Republican presidential candidate Mitt] Romney's pretty boy cowards.

I would prefer no one go to war, but supporting a war that you are not willing to fight and making idiot statements like it is an all volunteer Army and he is going to keep it that way make me even madder.

Of course he wants it voluntary so his precious pretty boys won't have to go because they already have health care and money for college.

My niece thinks her son needs discipline and apparently being shot at on a daily basis is just the ticket.

I have protested this war since before it started and having someone this close

to me encouraged to join sends me near over the edge.

My niece seems to think he will be fine and God will take care of him. Someone other than me needs to remind her that a lot of people pray and their kids are still coming home in transfer tubes.

She thinks he will get training for a job with the signal corps and that he is going to be working with satellites because that is what the recruiters said.

She actually believes that if her son does what the recruiter says he needs to do that the Army will live up to whatever the recruiter promised.

What a crock. If things don't work out she will blame her son for not living up to his side of the bargain when the Army is lying to kids and parents on a daily basis.

This is no damn summer camp to help kids.

- The author lives in Moore

Thank Sandra Day O'Connor For This Mess

By Barbara Santee

I was aghast with disbelief at Sandra Day O'Connor's comments in Tulsa recently that our constitutional liberties are at risk, and judges should make "fair and impartial decisions." She bristled at the suggestion that judges can be "activists," saying "We still have a Bill of Rights..."

But it's certainly no thanks to her that we still have a Bill of Rights. Of all of the Supreme Court justices in history, she singularly stands out as the one who personally is responsible for the gravest threat to our civil rights and the decline of our country precisely because she became a political activist on the bench.

At a watch party for the 2000 election when the first Florida projections named Gore as the winner, O'Connor said, "This is terrible." Her husband said having Gore as president would delay her retirement because she didn't want a Democrat naming her successor.

A month later, she was one of the five conservative Supreme Court justices who stopped the vote recount in Florida, literally handing the election to George Bush. Had she voted the other way, Al Gore would have become our president.

[A consortium of national newspapers found that if all of the illegally disqualified ballots statewide had been recounted using uniform standards, Gore would have won Florida.]

The Bush v. Gore decision was not based on any court precedent and the decision itself said that it should not be used as a precedent in future cases. [That fact alone admits that it was a political decision and not a legal one.]

That decision took the power away from the people who had elected Al Gore as president [as we later learned, he won the popular vote by over a half a million votes] and put it in the hands of five conservative justices who "selected" our president for us.

Because of that disgraceful decision, George Bush came to office with his pre-planned agenda, and the sorry state of affairs we have today.

Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children have been slaughtered in Iraq. Billions of dollars have been handed to the Bush-Cheney cronies in no-bid contracts. We are so weakened militarily and economically, we are sliding into a decline that we will never recover from.

It is clear that America is finished as an economic and moral leader. And that debacle is thanks to Sandra Day O'Connor whose personal motives and con-

servative politics single-handedly determined the outcome of one of the most important court decisions in the history of this country.

She is drenched in the blood of our soldiers. Her self-serving hypocrisy is enough to make a decent person gag.

- The author lives in Tulsa

Best And Brightest Will Boost Education

By Jonathan Kozol

In spite of the discouraging effects of high-stakes testing and the cold winds blowing down from Washington, I believe that a rebirth of public education - of the joy that teachers take in it and the benefits it brings to children - is ahead of us.

I'm meeting tens of thousands of the best and brightest students in our universities and colleges who are determined to come in and work with us in public schools, not voucher schools, not boutique schools, not semi-private charter schools run by the business sector.

They represent a burst of idealistic energy, a love for children, and a thirst for justice, which will reinforce the passions of those in the classroom now.

The tide of discontent with punitive, test-driven, and fear-driven methods of instruction is rising to the point at which I am convinced that we will see, within the next five years, a militant revival of enlightened opposition to these practices among our rank-and-file teachers.

These teachers know they are in a battle for the soul of public education.

Many feel intimidated by the sword of threats and sanctions under which they are obliged to teach today. But, sooner or later, these teachers will rise up and make their voices heard.

- Renowned educator and author

BOOKS

Bill Bradley's Rx For What Ails America

By Alvena Bieri

THE NEW AMERICAN STORY

By Bill Bradley

Random House Publishing Group

364 pages, \$25.95

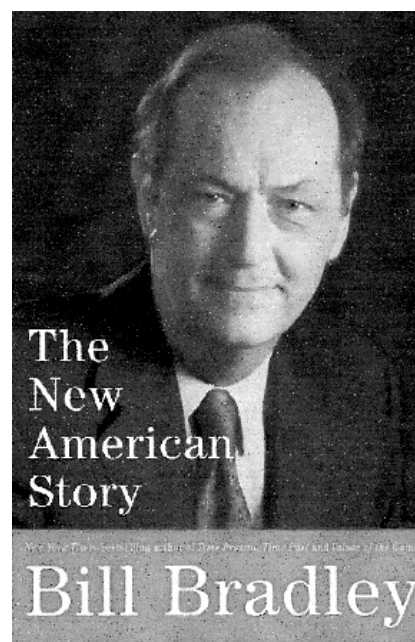
Renaissance man Bill Bradley is a person of so many talents they are hard to count. He was an outstanding basketball player at Princeton, a professional with the New York Knicks, a Rhodes scholar, and author of several other books. And he was a senator from New Jersey for three terms.

Now at the beginning it is important to understand what he means by "story." The spirit emanating from much of our government today is based on both fear and untruths. The fear is not just of terrorists, but it is accompanied by the reluctance to remember accurately the best things our country has done for us in the past. But the story we're told not is that large deficits are acceptable, that big household debt is all right too, even though many families have little or no money in savings accounts. His suggestions are to reduce the deficit as much as we can, invest in science, technology, and more financial help for going to college, to reduce defense spending by 10%, and to keep increasing the minimum wage.

Next, energy and the environment: The old story says we are not really running out of oil. We just need better ways of handling it.

"If government provides enough economic incentives and relief from excessive and environmental regulation, an abundant supply of oil is assured ..." And, of course, global warming is a myth. He follows with 10 practical suggestions like demanding more fuel-efficient cars, and ends with suggestions for international cooperation on this problem.

Bradley then comes out for a stronger Social Security system. The health care section is especially pertinent right now as politicians are slowly beginning to talk about it again. In the background are echoes of the old story that consumers should be more responsible for their own health and care. If you have the money in a crisis, just go to the emergency room. Then all of us taxpayers can help you. Bradley says the "major flaw in the story told about health care is the failure to acknowledge that systemic problems require systemic, not piecemeal, rem-



Bradley doesn't hold out much hope for the present political parties. Two of his chapters are entitled, "Why Republicans Can't" and "Why Democrats Don't"

edies." His new story asks us to see that we are a rich country, well able and even willing to help the poor. Yes, it gets complicated, but Bradley's recommendations could cover everyone by starting "Medicare for All, or making health insurance mandatory for all Americans with tax-credit or voucher subsidies based on income." He says it is also very important to emphasize preventive and primary care. That might save a lot of money.

Education is a big public concern. The old story says that vouchers are a great idea. He disagrees and would like to see improvements like national performance standards, better support for teachers, and pre-kindergarten programs.

In his summary chapter Bradley makes the point that our country does in fact have the money to create a positive New America story in each of his areas for improvement. The heart of the story is simply that we as American citizens need to understand that the new story is about looking out for each other and realizing that some things are just too big and important to be left to the private sector – public education, health care, the U.S. mail spring to mind, not to mention the interstate highway system. To forge common bonds would be good, but sadly he doesn't hold out much immediate hope for the present political parties. He calls Chapter 10 "Why Republicans Can't" and the next chapter "Why Democrats Don't."

Democrats now need to be stronger and braver, see the big picture, and counter the criticism of the past. They did it with the New Deal and the Great Society. Why not tap into the New American story and do it again?

– The author lives in Stillwater

Getting Your Kicks On ... The Lincoln

By Mike Nobles

THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY

Coast to Coast from Times Square to the Golden Gate

By Michael Wallis & Michael S. Williamson

W.W. Norton & Co.

320 pages, \$39.95

Quick, what do you get when you combine Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Michael S. Williamson and the ultimate Oklahoma road trip author Michael Wallis?

Well, in this case, one heck of a good book on the history of a road as interesting as Route 66, just not as famous ... yet.

The Lincoln Highway, America's first transcontinental highway, was the dream of Carl G. Fisher, founder of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and Henry B. Joy, president of Packard Motor Co. They thought of the idea in 1912 and it was completed in time for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915.

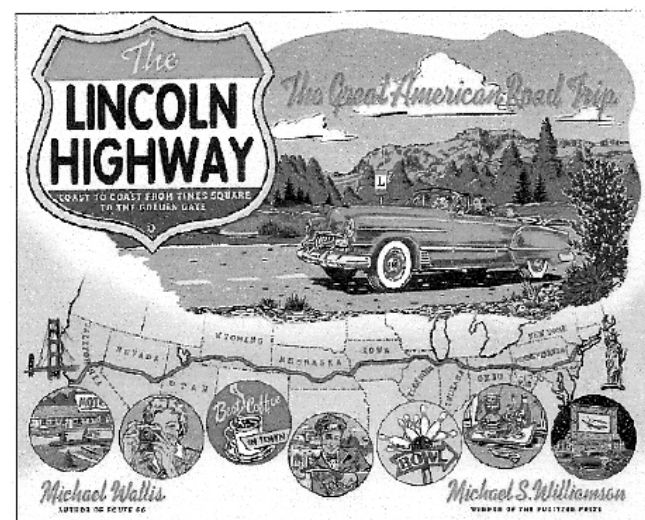
The highway, known as Route 30, stretches across 3,389 miles and 13 states [New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and California] running from Times Square in New York to the Golden Gate in San Francisco.

If you consider yourself a tourist and prefer the predictable food, lodging chains, and mostly straight lines of the Interstate Highway system you will likely not enjoy The Lincoln Highway. It is more for travelers. Those intrepid souls that prefer, indeed seek out, the lesser known sites well away from the beaten paths trod by the tourists. They are the types that perhaps Robert Frost had in mind when he penned *The Road Less Traveled*. You know, the one that makes all the difference.

With some 300 color illustrations by a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer and 320 pages jam-packed with Michael Wallis' award-winning writing, the book pays tribute to an era when the newly motoring American public was enticed to hit the road and explore a fading frontier.

Not only will the reader visit the better known sites such as Gettysburg, Notre Dame, the Great Salt Lake, the Gold Rush Trail, and the route of Pretty Boy Floyd but such jewels as "Hubcap City" in New Oxford, PA; a six-foot portrait of Ronald Reagan made from 14,000 jellybeans on display at the Dixon Historic Center in Dixon, IL; the Studebaker National Museum and Archives in South Bend, IN; and the not-to-be-missed Hotel Nevada in Ely, NV, neon and all.

Oh, did I mention the book also contains a resource guide, a special map, a bibliography and wonderful and helpful descriptions, photos, and locations of



historic diners?

This is a really wonderful book that is liable to inspire even the dedicated homebody to plan a cross-country road trip and journey of discovery. I suspect this book will rival those on Route 66 in its appeal to armchair travelers and windshield fanatics alike.

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

Trevor Helpline

866-4-U-TREVOR

24/7 suicide prevention/crisis
confidential help for
gay and questioning teens

Prioritize Children

Polled Voters Blast National Leadership

The Every Child Matters Education Fund [ECM] has conducted a series of four polls of likely primary voters and caucus participants in Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire and South Carolina. Also polled was a national sample of likely general election voters.

The results of all five polls provide a snapshot of where voters stand on the relative importance of children's issues, how well they think political leaders are doing in addressing these issues, and the investments they want elected leaders to make on children's behalf. Key points include:

Voters across the country [72%] believe that political leaders are not doing enough to ensure the health, education and well-being of children.

CHILDREN SHOULD BE HIGHER PRIORITY

Those polled said the next President and Congress need to give a higher priority to the country's children and spend less time on other issues [76%]. This concern permeates voters regardless of partisanship or region of the country.

Nearly half of voters nationally say that the health, education and well-being of children in America in the last 10 years have gotten worse [45%].

A significant share [38%] of voters say children's issues will be more important to them personally in the presidential election than in past elections. Children's issues will play a greater role with Independents [46%] than either Democrats [35%] or Republicans [33%].

INDEPENDENTS ARE MOST PESSIMISTIC

Independents are most pessimistic that when today's children in the United States grow up, they will not have the same opportunities that the current generations had [59% pessimistic compared to 40% of Democrats and 40% of Republicans].

Voters in the early primary and caucus states of Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada want candidates for President to provide a comprehensive agenda of how they would address the needs of children.

More than 86% of voters say that it is important for candidates for office to have a comprehensive children's agenda, with a majority [53%] finding it very important. Large majorities of likely Democratic and Republican voters want candidates to provide a comprehensive children's agenda.

HEADING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

Voters in the early primary and caucus states believe the country is heading

New Grads Suffer Income Inequality

By Krishna Guha

Earnings of the average American worker with an undergraduate degree have not kept up with gains in productivity in recent decades, according to research by academics at MIT that challenges traditional explanations of why income inequality is rising.

The findings, which were presented to the New America Foundation, come amid widespread unease about the sluggish trend in middle class income growth, both in absolute terms and relative to the new superstar class of chief executives, hedge fund managers and other financiers.

While in the short-term labor market conditions are now good for most U.S. workers, the state of the "American dream" is already emerging as a big theme in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election.

TRICKLE DOWN WITH NO TRICKLE

In a recent speech, Hillary Clinton, the Democratic front-runner, complained that "while productivity and corporate profits are up, the fruits of that success just haven't reached many of our families. It's like trickle-down economics but without the trickle."

Meanwhile, John Edwards, the former senator, has made "eliminating poverty within 30 years" a centerpiece of his left-leaning campaign, which stresses the problems of inequality in the U.S.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology economists, Frank Levy and Peter Temin, repeat earlier findings of the gap between the earnings of the average university graduate and high school graduate.

SLOWED IN RECENT YEARS

They were stable for much of the 1960s and 1970s - expanded relentlessly from 1980 to 2000, before slowing a little in recent years.

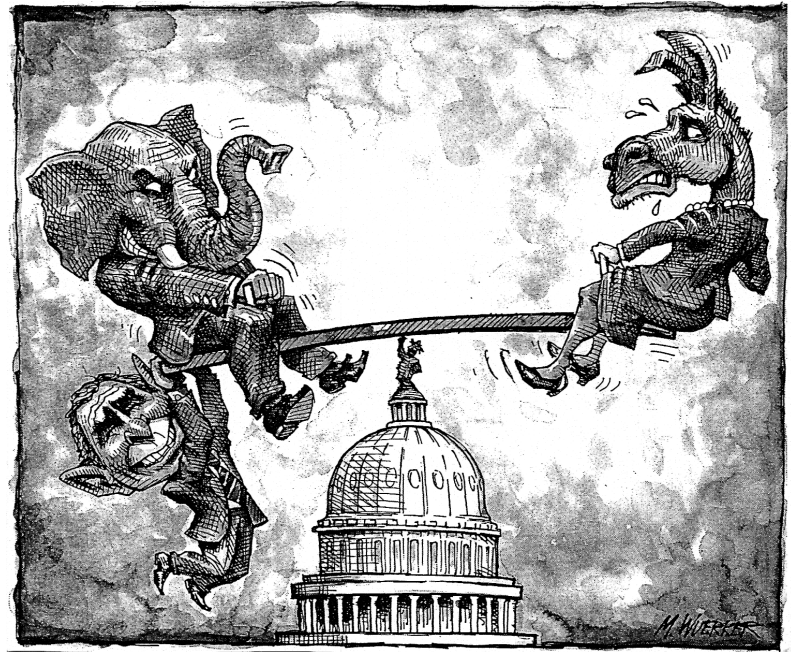
This is consistent with the conventional explanation that the rise in inequality is largely due to technology trends that disproportionately benefit skilled workers.

But Levy and Temin show that while graduates certainly did better than non-graduates in recent decades, the average graduate also failed to keep up with gains in economy-wide productivity, once those productivity gains are adjusted for the composition of the workforce.

MALE GRADUATES HIT THE HARDEST

Male graduates in particular failed to capture a full share of productivity advances, with female graduates keeping pace until the last five years - probably due to increasing opportunities for women in the workplace.

This casts doubt on the conventional argument that the solution to rising inequality is to improve the standard of education across the workforce as a whole, and encourage more people to go to university.



in the wrong direction and are pessimistic about the future of the nation's children.

Voters believe that Washington, DC is failing America's children and working families. Three-fifths [62%] agree with the statement that the needs of children are regularly elbowed off the table by stronger special interests.

The Congress and the Administration need to be doing a lot more on behalf of the nation's children and working families.

Only 20% think the federal government does a lot to help working families.

Among likely Democratic voters, 82% think the federal government is failing children. Significantly more Republicans believe Washington DC is failing America's children [42%] than think the federal government is doing a good job on their behalf [34%].

DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS RANK ISSUES

After the war in Iraq, Democratic primary and caucus voters rank the improvement of the health, education, and safety of children more important an issue for the next president than homeland security, immigration, global warming, or the economy.

Likely Republican voters rank immigration, homeland security, and the war in Iraq as the most important issues, followed by children's issues. No surprise.

Said ECM president and founder Michael Petit, "The needs of America's children and families are daunting, including millions of children without health insurance, millions still in poverty, millions reported abused, and millions and millions alone every day after school."

The polls were conducted by the independent firm of Mason-Dixon Polling and Research Inc.

"Is the average bachelor's degree still sufficient to catch the rising tide? In the case of men at least, the answer is no," the authors conclude.

They point out that rising inequality may still be caused by "skill-biased" technical change - but of a kind that disproportionately benefits the very skilled, rather than the merely educated.

POLICYMAKERS FACE HUGE HEADACHE

If so, this creates a huge headache for policymakers because while it is in principle at least possible to greatly expand the number of basic college places, it is not possible to send every worker in the U.S. to Harvard Business School.

Levy and Temin argue that the failure of workers even with undergraduate degrees to keep up with productivity is due to a change in labor market institutions and norms that reduced the bargaining power of most U.S. workers.

They argue "only a reorientation of government policy can restore the general prosperity of the postwar boom."

The paper follows the presentation of joint Pew/Brookings Institution research showing that men in their 30s earned on average 12% less in 2004 than their fathers did in 1974 after adjusting for inflation.

The Financial Times UK

Harvard's Civil Rights Project

After years of progress following the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision to desegregate public schools, segregation rates in our schools have been rising across the country.

Incredibly enough, the Bush Administration asked the Supreme Court this year to forbid school districts to take voluntary action to foster desegregation. In a 5-4 decision, the court complied.

Why should we care? For one thing, desegregated schooling has clear educational benefits - reduced prejudice, improved cross-racial cooperation, increased life chances for African-American students, and in some cases, higher achievement, especially among younger children.

Despite it not being a priority of our elected leaders, teachers can play a vital role in promoting desegregation. If they are lucky enough to teach in diverse classrooms, they can engage students in discussions about race and inequality and speak publicly about the benefits of racial diversity. Teachers must be leaders in the struggle for an integrated society. The future of a healthy multiracial society is at stake.

- Gary Orfield and Susan Eaton

NCLB Example Is Proof Of Failure

By Greg Palast

Every eight-year-old in the state of New York took a test. It was part of George Bush's No Child Left Behind program.

The losers were left behind to repeat the third grade. Try it yourself. This is from the state's actual practice test. Ready, class?

The year 1999 was a big one for the Williams sisters. In February, Serena won her first pro singles championship. In March, the sisters met for the first time in a tournament final. Venus won. And at doubles tennis, the Williams girls could not seem to lose that year.

And here's one of the four questions:

The story says that in 1999, the sisters could not seem to lose at doubles tennis. This probably means when they played

- A. two matches in one day
- B. against each other
- C. with two balls at once
- D. as partners

OK, class, do you know the answer? [By the way, I didn't cheat: there's nothing else about "doubles" in the text.]

NO TENNIS COURT IN THIS DISTRICT

My kids go to a New York City school in which more than half the students live below the poverty line. There is no tennis court.

There are no tennis courts in the elementary schools of Bed-Stuy or East Harlem. But out in the Hamptons, every school has a tennis court.

In Forest Hills, Westchester and Long Island's North Shore, the schools have nearly as many tennis courts as the school kids have live-in maids.

Now, you tell me, class, which kids are best prepared to answer the question about "doubles tennis?" The eight-year-olds in Harlem who've never played a set of doubles or the kids whose mummies disappear for two hours every Wednesday with Enrique the tennis pro?

Is this test a measure of "reading comprehension" – or a measure of wealth accumulation?

If you have any doubts about what the test is measuring, look at the next question, based on another part of the test, which reads [and I could not make this up]:

Most young tennis stars learn the game from coaches at private clubs. In this sentence, a club is probably a

- F. baseball bat
- G. tennis racquet
- H. tennis court
- J. country club

Helpfully, for the kids in our 'hood, it explains that a "country club" is a, "place where people meet." Yes, but which people?

THIS IS EXAMPLE OF BETTER OPTIONS?

President Bush told us, "By passing the No Child Left Behind Act, we are regularly testing every child and making sure they have better options when schools are not performing."

But there are no "better options." In the delicious double-speak of class war, when the tests have winnowed out the chaff and kids stamped failed, No Child Left Behind results in that child being left behind in the same grade to repeat the failure another year.

I can't say that Mr. Bush doesn't offer better options to the kids stamped failed. Under No Child Left Behind, if enough kids flunk the tests, their school is

NCLB Is Lowering Public Ed Standards

By Daniel De Vise

Montgomery County School Superintendent Jerry D. Weast said that the federal No Child Left Behind law has created a culture that has education leaders nationwide "shooting way too low" and that it has spawned a generation of state-wide tests that are too easy to pass.

Weast said the federal mandate, with its push for 100% proficiency on state tests, has driven states toward lower standards that don't prepare most students for college or careers.

"I think we've got to adjust up," he said. "Or at least give some flexibility for those who would like to adjust up."

Although some states, including Maryland, have been praised for holding children to comparatively high standards, Weast said the state curriculum, the state-wide Maryland School Assessment and the High School Assessment all measure a minimal level of academic proficiency.

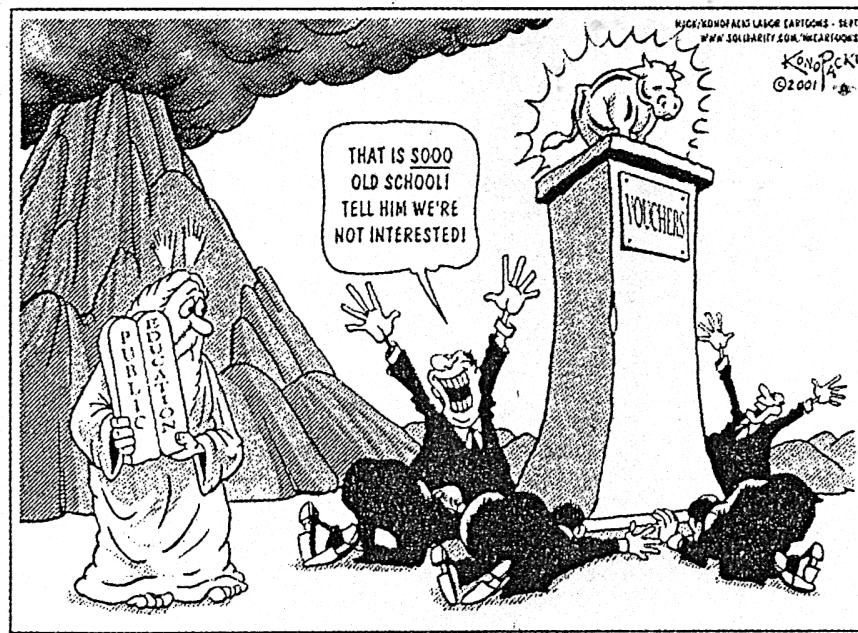
THEY WANT THE KIDS TO LOOK GOOD

The reason, he said, is that Maryland and most other states have leaders who want their kids "to look good" on such assessments.

Ron Peiffer, deputy Maryland school superintendent, said the state education standards "represent the floor, not the ceiling" of what students are expected to learn.

"Most students receive instruction that goes significantly beyond our Voluntary State Curriculum, and that is the way it should be," he said.

Weast addressed several major themes of the past academic year – his eighth



marked a failure and its students win the right, under the law, to transfer to any successful school in their district.

You can't provide more opportunity than that. But they don't provide it, the law promises it, without a single penny to make it happen. In New York in 2004, a third of a million students earned the right to transfer to better schools – in which there were only 8,000 places open.

WHERE WOULD THEY TRANSFER TO?

New York is typical. Nationwide, only one out of 200 students eligible to transfer manages to do it. Well, there's always the Army. [That option did not go unnoticed: No Child Left Behind has a special provision requiring schools to open their doors to military recruiters.]

Hint: When de-coding politicians' babble, to get to the real agenda, don't read their lips, read their budgets. And in his last budget, our President couldn't spare one thin dime for education, not 10 cents.

Mr. Big Spender provided for a derisory 8.4 cents on the dollar of the cost of primary and secondary schools. Congress appropriated a half penny of the nation's income – just one-half of one percent of America's twelve trillion dollar GDP – for primary and secondary education.

President Bush actually requested less. While Congress succeeded in prying out an itty-bitty increase in voted funding, that doesn't mean the extra cash actually gets to the students.

Fifteen states have sued the federal government on the grounds that the cost of new testing imposed on schools, \$3.9 billion, eats up the entire new funding budgeted for No Child Left Behind.

IT IS A PLAN TO TARGET MILLIONS OF KIDS

There are no "better options" for failing children, but there are better uses for them. The President ordered testing and more testing to hunt down, identify and target millions of children as too expensive, too heavy a burden, to educate.

No Child Left Behind offers no options for those with the test-score Mark of Cain – no opportunities, no hope, no plan, no funding. Rather, it is the new social Darwinism, educational eugenics: identify the nation's loser-class early on. Trap them then train them cheap.

Someone has to care for the privileged. No society can have winners without lots and lots of losers. And so we have No Child Left Behind – to provide the new worker drones that will clean the toilets at the Yale Alumni Club, punch the cash registers color-coded for illiterates, and pamper the winner-class on the higher floors of the new economic order.

Class war dismissed.

- Greg Palast is the author of the New York Times best-seller, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*. Read his investigative reports at www.GregPalast.com

as superintendent of the 140,000-student Montgomery school system.

FROM THE POOR TO THE AFFLUENT

Weast spoke of the difficulty of serving a large and growing population of low-income families in the corridor that stretches from Silver Spring to Gaithersburg, while simultaneously meeting the needs of affluent families in Bethesda, Potomac and western Montgomery.

Since Weast's arrival in 1999, the share of elementary students of "limited English proficiency" has more than doubled, to 14%.

The share receiving meal subsidies has risen from about 28% to 32%, according to state reports. Black, Hispanic and Asian populations have risen while white student population is 10,000 lower than it was in 1999.

Weast said that he has seen no signs of white flight and that the school system had seen a net gain in students transferring from private schools.

He said part of his mission is to remind parents that the school system's overall reputation hinges on the performance of all schools.

© Washington Post Writers Group

**GOD BLESS EVERYONE
[NO EXCEPTIONS]**

Tests Putting Image Ahead Of Learning

By Ledyard King

Almost every fourth-grader in Mississippi knows how to read. In Massachusetts, only half do.

So what's Mississippi doing that Massachusetts, the state with the most college graduates, isn't? Setting expectations too low?

The 2002 federal No Child Left Behind law was designed to raise education standards across the country by punishing schools that fail to make all kids proficient in math and reading.

But the law allows each state to chart its own course in meeting those objectives.

"Ironically, No Child reforms may have the exact opposite effect they were intended to have," said Bruce Fuller, an education and public policy professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

TEST SCORE ARE MISLEADING

A Gannett News Service analysis found that relying on state test scores to judge students' performance is misleading.

For example, 89% of Mississippi fourth-graders passed the state's reading test in 2005, but only 18% passed the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] test. That gap of 71 percentage points was the widest in the nation.

Massachusetts had one of the smallest gaps, with 50% of fourth-graders passing the state reading test and 44% passing the NAEP test.

The national test is taken only by a small percentage of students in each state and often includes questions on material that schools haven't covered yet.

Research indicates the gap between state test scores and NAEP scores has actually widened in many states since the federal law took effect.

THEY DEPLORE TEACHING TO THE TESTS

State education officials deny critics' claims that they're gaming the system by making their tests easier. They say it's unfair to compare state tests to NAEP. They deplore teaching to the test – a must under NCLB.

They also say any changes in testing policies came after careful review and were designed to make sure children learn what state standards require them to know. And they note that federal officials signed off on the changes.

"We didn't game anything," said Tom Horne, superintendent of public instruction in Arizona, which lowered passing scores on several tests in 2005. "We called together a task force and the state [school] board decided to follow their recommendation."

EVERY CHILD PROFICIENT BY 2014?

No Child Left Behind requires states to test students in math and reading from

Author Is Outlining NCLB Law Changes

By Dlane Jean Schemo

The chairman of the House Education Committee, an original architect of the federal No Child Left Behind law, said he wants to change the law so that annual reading and math tests would not be the sole measure of school performance.

He wants other indicators like high school graduation rates and test scores in other subjects taken into account.

"Our legislation will continue to place strong emphasis on reading and math skills," the chairman, Rep. George Miller, D-CA, said. "But it will allow states to use more than their reading and math test results to determine how well schools and students are doing."

Miller described an array of criticisms that have emerged over the past year in hearings on renewing the education law. He repeated his commitment to the law and spoke passionately of its goal of raising the achievement of poor and minority students.

FIRST INDICATION OF CHANGES

His comments were the first public disclosure of changes he would make to the law, which was put together by President Bush with strong bipartisan support in 2001.

Although business leaders and education and civil rights advocates praised Miller's vision for renewal, they also said they would reserve judgment until an actual bill appeared. Miller said that would probably occur in September.

In response to questions about his proposal for broadening the measures of student achievement, Miller said additional indicators of progress could include participation in advanced placement or college preparatory curriculums, high school graduation rates and statewide tests in subjects other than reading and math.

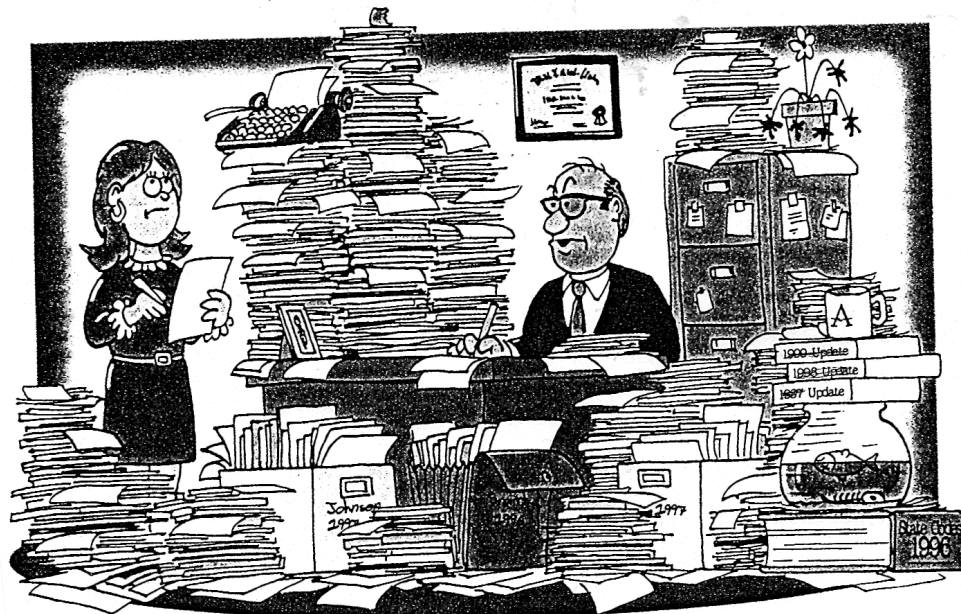
Students "would still have to do very well on reading and math," he said, adding, "This is not an escape hatch."

REPUBLICAN ISSUES WARNING

Miller's remarks provoked immediate reaction from the ranking Republican member on the education committee, Rep. Howard P. McKeon of California.

He said any changes that would weaken accountability, flexibility and parental choice will be met with strong opposition from House Republicans and are likely to be a fatal blow to the reauthorization process."

The White House referred questions to Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, who hinted that the Administration would rather see no bill at all than one



third through eighth grade and once in high school. Every child must be proficient in those subjects by 2014.

Schools that don't make "adequate yearly progress" toward that goal risk being flagged as under performing. Students at those struggling schools may transfer to a better school or the local school district could be forced to use its federal education money to pay for tutoring.

The independent Center on Education Policy issued a report saying student achievement on state tests has risen since 2002.

NCLB CAN'T CLAIM THE CREDIT

But it said "it's very difficult, if not impossible" to credit those gains to No Child Left Behind because states and districts already were making improvements before the law took effect.

Critics of the law say it has forced schools to drill kids and emphasize testing at the expense of other learning.

States and some independent experts say comparing scores on the federal and state tests isn't valid.

The national exam, they say, was never designed to compare standards from state to state. It's administered only to a sample of students, each of whom takes only a portion of the test.

Teachers and students are far more focused on the state tests because those tests determine whether their schools make adequate progress and, in some cases, whether seniors receive a diploma.

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that "rolled back the clock on school accountability."

"While we all hope to see action on reauthorization soon, a comprehensive bill that has bipartisan support and holds firm to the goal of every child reading and doing math on grade level by 2014 is worth the wait," Spellings said in a prepared statement.

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY COMPLAINTS

Miller acknowledged the many complaints about the NCLB law from school districts nationwide, saying:

"Throughout our schools and communities, the American people have a very strong sense that the No Child Left Behind Act is not fair. That it is not flexible. And that it is not funded. And they are not wrong."

Miller said he would also propose so-called pay for performance, which would pay teachers more based in part on how much their students improved, and a system to reward schools if students were on a trajectory to reach proficiency within a few years, even if they were not actually on grade level.

He also said a new law would differentiate between schools that failed on a broad scale and those in which only one or two groups of students came up short, allowing solutions tailored to each school's specific deficiencies.

Currently, the law requires annual testing in reading and math for students in grades three to eight. High school students must be tested once.

ALL WOULD BE PERFECT BY 2014?

Schools must report results to show that each demographic group – low-income, minority and special education students, along with students for whom English is a second language – is showing sufficient progress toward 100% proficiency by 2014.

High poverty schools that fail to show sufficient progress, which currently number more than 9,000, face steadily more severe penalties, including possible closure.

Susan Trueman, director of education and workforce policy at the Business Roundtable, a coalition of companies closely involved in the passage of the original law, said the group was encouraged by Miller's remarks but hoped to see a bill with bipartisan support.

"We need to see the details on what he means by these multiple measures and how these would work," Trueman said.

© The New York Times

Two Million Short?

Fewer Grads Take Public School Jobs

By Kevin Peters

Classroom enrollment is up in most parts of the country and so is the demand for public school teachers. But many states report that fewer people are choosing to become teachers – a trend that could lead to a national teacher shortage crisis.

This is especially true if baby boomers, who make up the largest age group in the profession, begin retiring en masse.

Increases in college tuition and new pressures to up student test scores have made low-paying teaching jobs less appealing, education advocates say.

America ranks 22nd in teacher salaries among all industrial nations.

Estimates of the need for new teachers within the next decade range up to two million.

Today's college graduates and new teachers typically change careers every five to seven years, thus turnover for teachers is at a record high.

HALF LEAVE WITHIN FIVE YEARS

An estimated half of all teachers leave the field within five years. The turnover costs states an estimated \$2.2 billion a year and leaves shortages in critical subject areas.

The shortfall is hitting schools hardest in the core subjects of math and science and in traditionally hard-to-staff areas such as special education and language training for non-English speakers, according to the American Association for Employment in Education [AAEE], which has tracked teacher supply and demand trends for nearly 30 years.

President Bush finally spotlighted the problem in his State of the Nation address in January by proposing \$380 million to recruit more math and science teachers to boost America's international competitiveness.

COLLEGES GRADUATING FEWER IN SCIENCE AND MATH

State institutions of higher education have not been graduating enough teachers in math, chemistry and physics for more than a dozen years, said AAEE executive director B.J. Bryant.

School administrators surveyed in nearly every region in the United States reported not having enough teachers to fill positions in more than 30 subject areas, nearly half the 64 fields covered by the survey.

Besides shortfalls in the sciences, nearly every state reported significant shortages in qualified special education teachers, who specialize in teaching students with mental and physical disabilities.

The shortage is expected to get more severe because nearly one-third of all teachers are ages 55 and older, Bryant said.

WHEN BOOMERS RETIRE IT WILL BE A PERFECT STORM

"Whenever that group of 55-year-plus begins to feel secure enough to retire, we'll see a demand in almost every field of teaching that will be impossible to



meet," she said.

Due to low pay [Oklahoma ranks 48th] numerous teachers with critical skills are recruited by other states, especially Texas.

Sun Belt states such as California, Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina and Texas are feeling the worst crunch, Bryant said.

North Carolina, for example, has to look outside the state to fill more than half its 10,000 teaching openings every year. By fall 2007, Florida will need to fill 30,000 teaching positions, double the amount in previous years because of a spike in retirement and the demands of a 2002 constitutional amendment to reduce classroom sizes.

CALIFORNIA SHORTAGE IS HORRIFIC

California was able to fill fewer than half of the 2,100 openings for high school math teachers in 2007, according to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Besides low pay, new teachers also are intimidated by Oklahoma's teaching license requirements, which are among the most rigorous in the nation.

Intense accountability measures under the federal No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] also have increased the pressure on teachers, who often get blamed if their schools are failing to meet NCLB targets.

NCLB, now being rewritten in Congress, is intended to close achievement gaps between students of different incomes and races and requires states to show gains in student test scores in reading and math every year until 100% of students score proficient by 2014.

Schools that fall short of annual goals face sanctions – which is the basis of the act, promoting transfers and vouchers for private and parochial schools.

"It's really unfair to our young teachers and discouraging them from entering the profession, particularly in the most challenging teaching environments where they're most needed," Bryant said.

© Stateline

Business Wants To Help U.S. Education

By V.A. Honawar

A vibrant, hands-on role for businesses in combating the much-publicized shortfall of math and science teachers in K-12 schools is the prediction of a new report.

Members of the Business-Higher Education Forum, an organization made up of Fortune 500 chiefs and higher education leaders, say the United States will need 280,000 new mathematics and science teachers by 2015.

There simply are not enough skilled teachers in those areas entering the profession or committing to long-term careers, the report underscores.

To help relieve the shortage, the Washington-based forum puts forth a detailed plan that calls on the federal and state governments, school districts, higher education institutions, and businesses to work in concert in teacher recruitment, retention, and continuing professional growth.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COULD PLAY A ROLE

For instance, in the area of retention, the federal government could expand support for comprehensive, research-based teacher-induction tools to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs.

School districts could establish, evaluate, and report on the programs; universities could conduct research on their effectiveness; and businesses could sponsor and support the programs.

Forum members hope their strategy would double the number of college graduates with degrees in critical STEM – science, technology, engineering, and math – disciplines in eight years.

Many reports in recent years have sought to highlight the problems in STEM Storm, which was prepared in 2005 by a panel of business leaders convened by the National Academies.

AMERICAN ECONOMY WOULD SUFFER

The report warned that the U.S. economy would suffer if it failed to improve the scientific and technological skills of its workforce.

But Brian Fitzgerald called for a strong role for business in addressing the critical shortage of math and science teachers, or identified sound strategies to

counter it.

"This report is unique because it deals with recruitment, retention, and renewal, and creates a road map for each of the five stakeholders to get this work done," he added.

Some recommendations in the report are familiar, such as scholarships for teacher education students in the STEM disciplines, differential pay for such teachers, and ongoing professional development.

A VARIETY OF NEW IDEAS

But there are new ideas as well, among them the creation of an administrator's position at each school – a vice principal of academic affairs to provide support for new teachers, help experienced teachers master classroom-instruction skills, and help all teachers develop and implement curricula.

While some may worry about adding another administrator to schools, the authors say the idea was modeled after the leadership of universities, where a president and a provost handle different affairs, complementing each other.

Gerald F. Wheeler, executive director of the National Science Teachers Association, in Arlington, VA, said that is one of the many proposals in the report he is excited about working with schools to carry out.

NSTA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EXCITED

"A vice principal for academic affairs could be a coordinating glue who would bring teachers together," he said.

The report also proposes early and aggressive teacher-recruitment efforts, such as targeting middle school students and presenting them with teaching as a viable career option.

With two major pieces of federal education legislation up for reauthorization, the No Child Left Behind Act and the Higher Education Act, forum members said a window of opportunity is open to influence significant change.

Investing in STEM programs, Fitzgerald said, is "a national imperative" to keep the United States intellectually vibrant and economically competitive.

www.edweek.org.

Supreme Court Dodges

School Failure Is A Poverty Problem

By Dick Lilly

Now that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that race cannot be used as a factor in assigning students to schools, family income is likely to play a big role in many districts in determining where students attend classes, in allocating resources to neighborhood schools serving disadvantaged kids, or both.

A 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Seattle Public Schools' use of race to determine assignments to over-subscribed high schools.

But by setting race aside, the court's decision may serve to focus educators on the common denominator among children our public schools are failing to serve: poverty.

All are disappointed and frustrated that our public schools aren't better.

Look at the achievement gap: Children from several ethnic groups – African-American, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander – score far below their white and Asian-heritage classmates.

IF THEY CAN'T READ THEY LIKELY WILL DROP OUT

Among kids from those ethnic groups and, notably, kids from lower income families, three or four children in 10 [depending on ethnicity] can't read at grade level by the end of the fourth grade, according to results from the Assessment of Student Learning in 2006.

They are on track to be high school dropouts. As such, they will suffer for a lifetime the indignities of poverty, burden our social services [half of the U.S. prison population reads only at a ninth-grade level or below], and test the compassion of our communities.

We pay a very high price for what schools don't do. In contrast, among white and Asian-American kids in Seattle Public Schools, nine out of 10 read at grade level by the fourth grade. This is the achievement gap.

PUNDITS DIVE BOMBING THE SCHOOLS

Not surprisingly, since the court's ruling, a whole slew of pundits dive bombing from the right have used the persistence of this gap as evidence that race-based policies along the desegregation-integration-diversity continuum haven't produced improvements in educational outcomes as advertised.

This argument ignores the growth of the African-American, Latino, and other minority-group middle classes over the past 40 years, social gains likely impossible without the intervention of our public schools.

In this broad sense, the role of schools as a tool to ensure equality of opportunity and social mobility remains largely untouched by the Supreme Court's ruling.

Justice Anthony Kennedy's opinion [though Kennedy sided with the majority against the Seattle plan] said that a "compelling interest exists in avoiding racial isolation, an interest that a school district, in its discretion and expertise, may choose to pursue."

FOCUS RESOURCES ON POVERTY

For the foreseeable future, race-based admissions policies can't be used.

School Experiment

Pay Kids To Learn Will Be A Failure

By Barry Schwartz

New York City has decided to offer cash rewards to some students based on their attendance records and exam performance. Diligent, high-achieving seventh graders will be able to earn up to \$500 in a year.

The plan is the brainchild of Roland G. Flyer, an economist who has been appointed as "chief equality officer" of the city's Department of Education.

The assumption that underlies the project is simple: people respond to incentives. If you want people to do something, you have to make it worth their while. This assumption drives virtually all of economic theory.

Sure, there are already many rewards in learning: gaining understanding [of yourself and others], having mysterious or unfamiliar aspects of the world opened up to you, demonstrating mastery, satisfying curiosity, inhabiting imaginary worlds created by others, and so on.

Learning is also the route to more prosaic rewards, like getting into good colleges and getting good jobs. But these rewards are not doing the job. If they were, children would be doing better in school.

GIVE A PERSON TWO REASONS TO ACT

The logic of the plan reveals a second assumption that economists make: the more motives the better. Give people two reasons to do something, the thinking goes, and they will be more likely to do it, and they'll do it better than if they have only one.

Providing some cash won't disturb the other rewards of learning, rewards that are intrinsic to the process itself. They will only provide a little boost. Flyer's reward scheme is intended to add incentives to the ones that already exist.

Unfortunately, these assumptions that economists make about human motivation, though intuitive and straightforward, are false.



So given a commitment to the public school role in equal opportunity and social mobility, what next?

As always with education, there's no simple answer, but affected schools have two ways to increase efforts on behalf of low-income students who enter school academically behind, from the first day of kindergarten.

The first, and a fairly direct, replacement for the race-based policy the Roberts court rejected would be school assignment preferences for the children from low-income families.

The second would be significantly increasing the money spent in schools in low-income neighborhoods. The latter would require significant changes in the way the schools do business but might in the end be more effective.

Dramatically varying school quality among inner-city schools, as measured by student test scores, correlates closely with the income of families whose kids are enrolled.

WE KNOW THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION

The higher the percentage of children qualifying for free or reduced-price school lunches, the lower the test scores. This has been a given for years.

The increasingly urgent question for education is how to serve low-income children, especially those enrolled in schools serving areas of concentrated poverty.

How can these kids be brought up to middle-class achievement levels, at least in the basic skills of reading and math?

The question is part of a constant conversation in the education world.

The answer you hear among parents, school administrators, and school board members is the good-hearted and wonderfully ambitious "make all schools good schools."

The Supreme Court's decision against racial preferences has opened up a conversation among school board members, led by possible replacement factors, chief among them family income – poverty – so kids from low-income families would get preferences in school assignments.

Among other things, such a policy likely would give these children an advantage in assignments to the highly regarded alternative schools.

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In particular, the idea that adding motives always helps is false. There are circumstances in which adding an incentive competes with other motives and diminishes their impact. Psychologists have known this for more than 30 years.

REWARDS OF LEARNING AREN'T WORKING

Obviously, the intrinsic rewards of learning aren't working in New York's schools, at least not for a lot of children. It may be that the current state of achievement is low enough that desperate measures are called for, and it's worth trying anything. And we don't know whether, in this case, motives will complement or compete.

Perhaps worse, the plan will distract us from investigating a more pertinent set of questions: why don't children get intrinsic satisfaction from learning in school, and how can this failing of education be fixed?

Virtually all kindergartners are eager to learn. But by fourth grade, many students need to be bribed. What makes our schools so dystopian that they produce this powerful transformation, almost overnight?

– The author is a professor of psychology at Swarthmore College

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For Some Colleges It Is Play For Pay

By Alan Finder

SANTA ANA PUEBLO, NM – The setting for a conference of university, school and hospital officials could not have been more luxurious: a resort in the high desert north of Albuquerque, with a championship golf course, swimming pools, a spa and views of distant mountain peaks.

For companies wanting to do business with the 200 or so officials attending the gathering, the Sustainable Operations Summit, there was an added benefit.

For \$18,500, a vendor was guaranteed 15 one-on-one sales meetings with officials at the conference, held here in June. A company that sent two representatives paid \$25,500, with each promised 15 private sessions.

University officials and others who were attending were told flatly that they were required to go to the meetings.

On the heels of the student loan scandal, some higher education officials – and even some consultants seeking access to them – called the conference's format deeply troubling. How, they asked, could university executives tolerate having access to them bought and sold so overtly?

TRADING ON YOUR NAME, YOUR OFFICE

"Why would you let a third party trade on your name and your office?" said Barmak Nassirian, associate executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

"I really would have to question if it's ever appropriate for a third party to charge a fee for an appointment with me."

Richard A. Hesel, a principal of the Art & Science Group, a marketing consultant to colleges, put it more bluntly: "This is a form of trying to buy influence. People are paying for access."

WORTHY OF A PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

The American Council on Education, using a fund-raising technique worthy of a presidential campaign, created a President's Circle; corporations that pay at



least \$200,000, according to the council's Web site, get opportunities for meetings with university presidents and chancellors. The money is used to support programs and research, officials said.

Other national associations of university officials continue to solicit expensive sponsorships. The National Association of College and University Business Officers was offered six levels of sponsorships for its annual convention in New Orleans in July. The most expensive level, called the diamond, cost at least \$30,000.

Universities are big business; a renovated library can cost more than \$50 million, and a new science complex can cost from \$50 million to \$600 million.

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U.S. Flags Hundreds Of Colleges' Loans

By Kevin Drawbaugh

After months of scandal in the student loan business, a federal regulator said that recent research revealed a potentially worrisome lack of competing lenders at hundreds of U.S. colleges.

Seventy percent or more of student loans were provided by a single lender at as many as 800 colleges in the last school year, said Jeff Baker, policy liaison at the U.S. Department of Education's federal student aid office.

The initial list included the University of Central Oklahoma.

"That was a little flag to us that perhaps, just perhaps, the institution isn't quite being open enough to their students and parents about who they could borrow from," he told an annual meeting of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

URGED TO EXAMINE INTERNAL POLICIES

The department sent a letter to those schools urging them to examine their own internal policies.

"It just stated that we've noticed this data trend and we want to make sure that you look at your own processes to make sure that this very high level of all the borrowers getting loans from the same lender, 70% or 80%, is not a violation of any of our requirements," Baker said.

Baker said the department's findings were based on research done last month using the National Student Loan Data System.

"We'll continue to do that on an ongoing basis and look at our data in a number of ways," he said.

IT IS AN \$85 BILLION PROGRAM

His remarks at the aid officers' annual conference came amid turmoil in the \$85 billion student loan industry, with Congress considering several bills meant

to address allegations made earlier this year of kickbacks and conflicts of interest.

Dozens of colleges and 10 top student lenders – including sector leaders Sallie Mae, Citigroup Inc. and Bank of America Corp. – have agreed to a code of conduct drawn up by New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo.

Cuomo has led state and congressional inquiries finding that some lenders gave colleges and aid officers payments, services and perks in exchange for being promoted on campus to potential student borrowers as "preferred" lenders.

WHAT CUOMO CODE IS DESIGNED TO DO

The Cuomo code is designed to help ensure that students get enough assistance and information to understand the costs of loans and all the borrowing options available to them.

Some other lenders adopting the code include JPMorgan Chase & Co., Wells Fargo & Co., CIT Group, Wachovia Corp. and National City Corp.

In addition to college aid officers, top lenders also attended the conference, exhibiting their services at colorful booths offering pens, tote bags and other promotional items.

Congressional investigators said that at the 2005 conference, JPMorgan arranged a \$70,000 dinner cruise in New York harbor for more than 200 aid officers, including bus transport from the conference to the ship, beer and wine, and dancing.

There was no obvious sign of a cruise at this year's gathering, where the usual agenda of special-interest seminars on policy, compliance and technology also included three sessions on ethics and one on how to be "media-savvy."

© Reuters

What Do You Make? A Teacher Replies

The dinner guests were sitting around the table discussing life.

One man, a CEO, decided to explain the problem with education.

He argued, "What's a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher?"

He reminded the other dinner guests what they say about teachers: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach."

To stress his point he said to another guest, "You're a teacher, Bonnie. Be honest. What do you make?"

Bonnie, who had a reputation for honesty and frankness replied, "You want to know what I make? [She paused for a second, then began ...]

"Well, I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I make a C+ feel like the Congressional Medal of Honor. I make kids sit through 40 minutes of class time when their parents can't make them sit for five without an iPod, Game Cube or movie rental ...

"You want to know what I make? [She paused again and looked at each and ev-

ery person at the table.] I make kids wonder. I make them question. I make them criticize. I make them apologize and mean it. I make them have respect and take responsibility for their actions.

"I teach them to write and then I make them write. I make them read, read, read. I make them show all their work in math. I make my students from other countries learn everything they need to know in English while preserving their unique cultural identity.

"I make my classroom a place where all my students feel safe. Finally, I make them understand that if they use the gifts they were given, work hard, and follow their hearts, they can succeed in life. [Bonnie paused one last time and then continued.]

"Then, when people try to judge me by what I make, I can hold my head up high and pay no attention because they are ignorant ... You want to know what I make? I make a difference! What do you make?"

– Thanks to Joyce Swain for this gem

Bush D.C. Voucher Program Is Failing

By George Thompson

Students in the District of Columbia school voucher program, the first federal initiative to spend taxpayer dollars on private school tuition, performed no better on reading and math tests after one year in the program than their peers in public schools.

This isn't a statement from the National Education Association or American Federation of Teachers; it comes from the U.S. Department of Education. The voucher program was heavily lobbied through by the Catholic hierarchy.

The department's report found only a few exceptions to the conclusion that the program has not had a significant impact on achievement.

Students who moved from higher-performing public schools and who scored well on tests before entering the program performed better in math than their peers who stayed in public school. Duh!

POOR RESULTS MAY INFLAME THE DEBATE

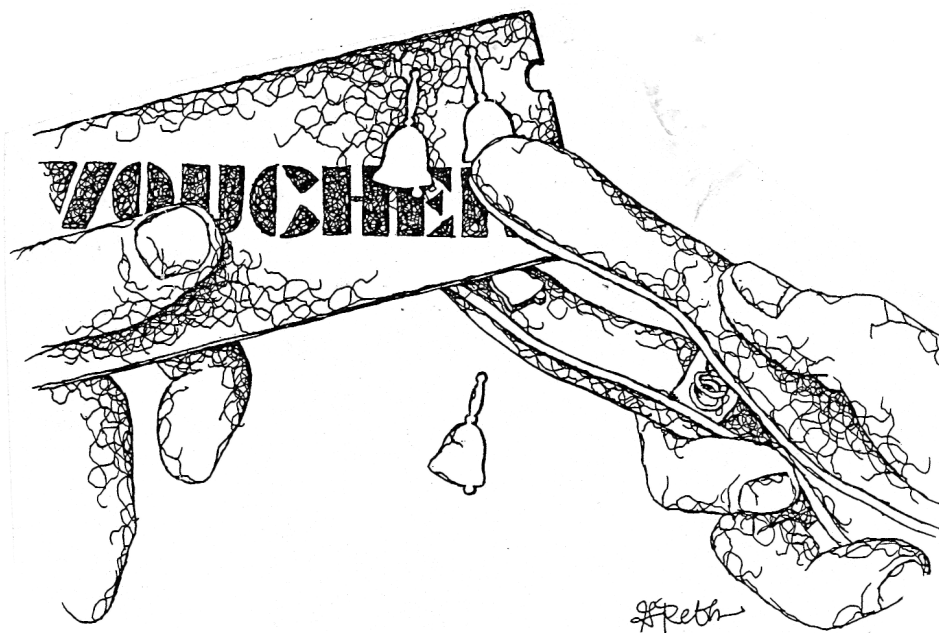
The results are likely to inflame a national debate about using public money for private education. Many Democrats, who have long opposed such programs, said the study was evidence that vouchers are ineffective. "Vouchers have received a failing grade," said Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, D-DC. "This just makes the voucher program even more irrelevant."

A Republican-led Congress created the \$14 million-a-year program in 2004. The five-year initiative provides \$7,500 vouchers each year to 1,800 students, from kindergartners to high school seniors, who attend 58 private schools, most of them Catholic schools. Several went to a Baptist church school.

Known as the DC Opportunity Scholarship program, the initiative is one of the few government-run voucher systems in the country. Milwaukee and Ohio have similar plans, and Florida and Arizona offer vouchers to special education students.

VOUCHERS DON'T LIVE UP TO THE HYPE

In studies of those programs and others funded with private money, researchers tended to find little improvement in test scores after one year, said Paul



Peterson, director of Harvard University's program on education policy and governance.

The report, released by the Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences, examined test scores from more than 2,000 students who entered a lottery for admission to the voucher program.

Scores from students accepted in the program were compared with scores from those who weren't. The study followed two groups of students in their first year in the program, 2004-05 and 2005-06.

The report also found no evidence that students in the program were safer than their counterparts, even though their parents thought they were.

The Bush Administration wants to expand vouchers nationwide through revisions in the No Child Left Behind law. Democrats said the new report will make it easier for them to kill such proposals.

"This report offers even more proof that private school vouchers won't improve student achievement and are nothing more than a tired political gimmick," Rep. George Miller, D-CA, chairman of the House Education Committee, said in a statement.

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10 Reasons To Oppose Vouchers

1. America cannot afford to finance private education as well as public education. There would be only two ways to pay for vouchers – take money from already underfunded public schools or raise taxes. Both are unacceptable.

2. Tax dollars for private education won't fix student achievement problems at public schools. The best way to assist all low-performing students is by strengthening their public schools and addressing individual learning problems directly.

Vouchers could take away tax dollars from the public schools where children have the greatest needs.

3. A voucher would be a ticket to nowhere for most children. Private schools can choose to accept or reject any student, and many have long waiting lists and only admit top students. On average, religious schools reject 67% of all applicants.

Elite private schools reject nearly 90% of applicants. "Choice" does not reside with parents but with private school admissions committees.

4. Parents have an expanding array of choices for the public school their child attends. Among the many public school options, parents may transfer their child to another public school in the same or a neighboring school district, or enroll their child in a public magnet school, charter school, school-to-work program, or an evening high school.

5. Vouchers don't create a "competitive marketplace." Competition is based on an even playing field; there is no fair competition when "competitors" play by different rules. Public schools have to accept all applicants; private schools don't.

Private schools are not required to provide transportation, special education, bilingual education, free and reduced price lunches, and many other programs that public schools provide.

6. States should not spend tax dollars to pilot test a bad idea. Tax funded pilot projects should only be conducted to test good ideas. Vouchers are a bad idea! A pilot voucher program would not be a "lifeboat" for some students, as claimed.

A voucher system would be the Titanic, draining needed funds from public schools where most of the students would remain.

7. Vouchers would destroy the "private" in private schools. Parents of children in private schools don't want the status quo disturbed for their children – they want their schools to be truly private. It is likely that private schools accepting tax-funded vouchers would have to change admission requirements, implement state-required testing, comply with discipline and expulsion laws, and allow voucher students to be exempted from religious activities.

8. Inserting the word "private" doesn't make a school good. There is no proof that private school vouchers would improve students' academic performance.

In fact, students attending private schools under the Milwaukee Vouchers would promote further religious and economic stratification in our society. Private elementary and secondary schools have been founded primarily by two types of entities:

- Religious denominations seeking to teach academics interwoven with their religious doctrine.

- Wealthier parents wanting to give their children an advantage over other children.

9. Tax-funded vouchers for private schools would increase divisions between rich and poor and among different religions, threatening the future of our American democracy.

10. Public policy should respect parental choice but provide for all students. The best public policy is to provide parents with even more choices within the public schools, which serve over 90% of children.

Legislators should concentrate on making all public schools stronger, safer, more challenging and accountable. Public tax dollars should be spent only to improve public schools – not to assist the limited number of parents who choose to enroll their children in private secular or religious schools.

Public Education Is A Public Benefit

Let's tell the world what's right with our public education system. Most of the current dialogue on public education taking place throughout the nation centers on funding, standards and test scores.

Important issues? Absolutely. But perhaps even more important is the fundamental issue at the heart of the debate – the value of public education.

Martin G. Petersen believes that public education is the backbone of our democracy and provides the basic building blocks of our commonalities.

Public schools educate our children, contribute to a qualified work force and help to create active, knowledgeable citizens. Is the system perfect? No. Are we making improvements? Yes!

He's convinced that public education is the best investment we can make in our country.

Frosty Troy has said, "Everything America is, or ever hopes to be, depends upon what happens to the millions of students in our public school classrooms."

This cheerleader for public education has added, "Every autumn, the miracle of America takes place when the doors [of our public schools] are thrown open, welcoming the genius and slow learner, rich and poor, average and developmentally disabled. Among them are the loved and unloved, the washed and unwashed."

And who is there to greet this mass of humanity that passes through our doors?

They're all around you – the dedicated school bus driver, who travels miles each day to deliver his/her precious cargo. The custodian, who makes sure the school is clean and safe. The principal, who's on the front line; and the teacher eager to meet the next mayor, the next surgeon, the next astronaut she/he will teach this year.

© Pen Weekly

Girls Face Stark Discrimination

By Terri Judd and Harriet Griffey

A stunning new report documents almost 100 million girls “disappearing” each year, killed in the womb or as babies.

The report, “Because I am a Girl,” exposes the gender discrimination which remains deeply entrenched and widely tolerated across the world, including the fact that female murder in the womb is on the increase in countries where a male child remains more valued.

The report highlights the fact that two million girls a year still suffer genital mutilation, half a million die during pregnancy – the leading killer among 15 to 19-year-olds – every 12 months and an estimated 7.3 million are living with HIV/Aids compared with 4.5 million young men.

Almost a million girls fall victim to child traffickers each year compared with a quarter that number of boys.

Of the 1.5 billion people living in poverty, 70% are female, with 96 million young women aged 15 to 24 unable to read or write – almost double the number for males.

THE PROBLEM IS WORLDWIDE

While many of the most shocking figures in the Plan International report relate to developing nations, sexual discrimination is still prevalent in the north.

America leads the industrial world in teen births and out-of-wedlock births.

In the UK, two women a week are killed by current or former partners.

The country also has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe.

Having a baby at a young age means women are more likely to miss out on education and slip into poverty.

There has also been a substantial rise in obesity in young girls in America.

While girls often out-perform boys in school, they are still victims of discrimination in the workplace. The report points out that a recent study found they were still woefully underrepresented in the boardroom, in politics and the courts.

While the pay gap between young men and women is 3.7%, it rises to 10.7% for those in their 30s.

GIRLS ACHIEVE IN COLLEGE, NOT BOARDROOMS

“Even if you look at the West, life is still difficult for some minority girls,” said Marie Staunton, chief executive of Plan International. “More girls are going to university but then it flattens off. They have broken through the marble ceiling into management but not through the glass ceiling into the boardroom.”

The GOP's Big Health Scare

By Joe Conason

Listening to the Republican candidates for president warn against “socialized medicine,” you might believe that national health insurance is really a plot to institute Soviet rule in the United States.

The most feverish rhetoric comes from Mitt Romney and Rudolph Giuliani, both hoping that their shrillness will prove that they are truly and deeply right wing – all the while trying to avoid honest debate about the future of American health care.

For Romney, health reform is double-edged: As the former governor of Massachusetts, he claims credit for that state's new universal care program – which he calls “fabulous” – but he fears being labeled liberal. His solution is simply to ignore the basic provisions of the legislation that he signed.

“This is a country that can get all of our people insured with not a government takeover, without HillaryCare, without socialized medicine,” he proclaimed during a Republican debate this past spring. “We didn't expand government programs.”

MITT'S MEMORY MISSING-IN-ACTION

Actually, his fabulous Bay State plan is based entirely on governmental action, from mandating insurance coverage and minimum coverage requirements to subsidizing insurance and imposing fines on those who fail to comply.

Perhaps Romney needs medical attention himself, since he already seems to be suffering from Alzheimer's disease. This isn't the first time his capacity to recall facts about his own career has dimmed out.

As for Giuliani, he, too, sees the frightening specter of foreign ideology in proposals for universal health care, which he denounced the other day as “socialist” schemes that “would bankrupt the government.” According to him, Democrats are conspiring to impose the kind of care preferred by citizens across the industrialized world.

“That is where Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards are taking you,” he thundered. “You have got to see the trap. Otherwise we are in for a disaster. We are in for Canadian health care, French health care, British health care.”

RUDY'S PLAN? BUSH, THE SEQUEL

Giuliani's alternative is a retreat of rejected Bush administration proposals, dressing up more tax cuts for the affluent as “health savings accounts.” Knowing that this would do little to cover more than 45 million uninsured Americans, he also suggests a federal subsidy to help people buy insurance. But he won't say how he would pay for that plan.

Neither the Romney nor the Giuliani proposal would accomplish the modernization and reform that the nation needs, and neither would ever reach universal coverage.



The “Because I am a Girl” campaign just launched highlights discrimination and will work towards improving gender equality worldwide.

Designed to run until 2015, the campaign will also follow the lives of 125 girls born in 2006 until their ninth birthday. The report is the first in a series of nine studies by Plan International – a global child development agency.

Statistics show that 62 million girls are not even receiving primary school education while an estimated 450 million have stunted growth because of childhood malnutrition.

“Why, in an era that saw the term ‘girl power’ coined, are millions of girls being condemned to a life of inequality and poverty?” the report asks.

Grace Machel, the children's rights campaigner from Mozambique, said: “The study shows that our failure to make an equal, more just world has resulted in the most intolerable of situations. To discriminate on the basis of sex and gender is morally indefensible; it is economically, politically and socially unsupportable.”

The Independent UK

What they might achieve, however, is a multibillion-dollar giveaway of taxpayer funds to the insurance industry.

In Massachusetts, the bids for subsidized coverage from major insurance companies are already much higher than Romney predicted, and many fewer uninsured have enrolled than he once expected.

HOW ABOUT AN HONEST DISCUSSION OF HEALTH CARE?

An honest discussion of the American health care system would begin by recognizing that government plays an important role and will continue to do so.

No candidate is proposing to do away with Medicare, Medicaid and the Veterans Administration. Despite their consistent underfunding, those systems achieve efficiencies that the private sector cannot match.

So when politicians decry health care in France, Britain, Canada and other industrialized countries as “socialist,” they're insulting the intelligence of voters. They assume nobody here knows that voters in those capitalist nations overwhelmingly support the national health systems – which happen to spend far less money per capita than ours while providing more care.

Even the most conservative politicians in Europe don't dare to suggest replacing those universal public systems with a system of expensive, privatized chaos such as ours.

WHY OTHERS DO IT WHEN WE CAN'T

While health care is a highly complex matter, the reason that other countries can afford to cover all of their citizens – while spending a smaller portion of their national income than we do – is fairly simple.

As a study by Physicians for A National Health Program revealed, more than 30% of health care costs in the United States represent profits and paperwork. Roughly 20% goes to insurance companies alone, which burn enormous amounts of money finding ways to deny care to their policyholders.

Remember that every hospital and doctor must cope simultaneously with the demands of numerous insurance companies. The result is an ongoing nightmare of corporate bureaucracy and paper-shuffling waste.

Americans have endured the excessive costs, skewed priorities and terrible inefficiencies of our outmoded health care system for decades while other advanced nations surpassed us.

Now our basic industries and our future solvency are threatened by our failure to address this problem realistically and fairly.

We need reforms that encourage preventive care, wring out bureaucratic waste, utilize information technology and guarantee the security of every citizen.

Scary talk about socialism won't get us there.

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History Won't Be Kind To Karl Rove

By Joe Conason

Until the ethical and legal questions that trail Karl Rove are answered, his own explanation for abruptly departing the White House must suffice. Perhaps he is the first pol in history to flee Washington because he actually wants to spend more time with his family, as he said.

Why he is leaving matters much less, however, than the opportunities he squandered and the wreckage he leaves behind.

Inevitably, thousands of words will be devoted to his electoral achievements and his ultimate failure to "realign" American politics – including a book he apparently plans to write. His vision of a new Republican era proved to be more grandiose than grand. As "the architect," he turned out to be more journeyman than genius.

Rove's quest was finally frustrated, he certainly exercised enormous influence at a fateful time in our history. His petty nastiness came to matter a great deal, not because of elections won or lost but because of the polarization he exaggerated and exploited. His bad advice to George W. Bush weakened us in the name of patriotism.

ROVE DOCTRINE: WAR AS A PARTISAN INSTRUMENT

In the aftermath of 9/11, the worst attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor, Bush quickly abandoned the example of past wartime presidents who struggled to bring the entire nation together against the enemy.

With astronomical approval ratings and extraordinary unity, the president could have accomplished almost anything. But following his political guru's direction, Bush used war as a partisan instrument – which meant dividing, not uniting, America.

Within months after Democrats and Republicans joined arms on the Capitol steps, standing with the president against the jihadists, Rove told the Republican National Committee that the "war on terror" would become, in effect, an assault on the loyal opposition.

To win the midterm election, the White House would turn on the Democrats who had faithfully supported the invasion of Afghanistan and the USA Patriot Act.

"We can go to the country on this issue," predicted Rove in January 2002, "because they trust the Republican Party to do a better job of protecting and strengthening America's military might and thereby protecting America."

THE VILIFICATION OF MAX CLELAND

That bland description scarcely did justice to the campaign that ensued.

The viciousness on the Republican side was typified by an ad campaign that led to the defeat of Sen. Max Cleland, a triple-amputee Army veteran and bronze and silver star winner, by painting him as a stooge of terrorism.

Relishing those tactics, Rove could not have cared less about their effect on national morale and unity. Besides, he was already planning to win the upcoming presidential contest the same way.

He orchestrated the politicization of the 9/11 attacks in advertising and at the New York convention, punctuated by dark warnings that a Democratic victory would signal weakness to the lurking terrorists.

THE MORE SUCCESS, THE MORE VITUPERATIVE

Emboldened by his electoral triumphs, Rove grew still more aggressive and vituperative. In June 2005, while addressing the New York Conservative Party's annual dinner, he fabricated a fraudulent narrative of the war to justify his divisive strategies.

Rove: The Second Coming Of Donald Segretti

By Nathaniel Batchelder

Karl Rove cut his teeth, politically, as a summertime college intern with Donald Segretti's dirty tricks team working for President Richard Nixon, self-named "the Rat F-----s."

Their "dirty tricks" against political opponents included planting the story in Maine newspapers that Democratic presidential hopeful Edmund Muskie's wife was alcoholic.

Muskie's impassioned news conference denial ended his Presidential aspirations ... he shed a tear while defending his wife. Score One for the Rat F-----s.

Rove was also the "genius" behind GWBush's successful Texas gubernatorial campaign which included spreading the rumor that Gov. Ann Richards was a lesbian.

ROVE'S HOMOPHOBIC 'GENIUS'

So, Rove was undoubtedly the "genius" behind the spate of state resolutions to "Ban Homosexual Marriage" which successfully drew millions of religious fundamentalists out to vote [for Republicans].

In Oklahoma, many House Democrats stupidly voted to place this homophobic Constitutional Amendment on the statewide ballot, effectively insuring that Republicans would win the majority in the Legislature.

Rove's "genius" was also probably behind the "Swift-Boat-Veterans-for-Truth" campaign which had only three members [multi-millionaires] who funded the national TV ad campaign and the "Purple Heart Band-Aids" worn on faces at the Republican National Convention.

[Get it? They implied that John Kerry's Purple Hearts in Vietnam were awarded



With angry sarcasm, he described how conservatives supposedly differ from liberals:

"Conservatives saw the savagery of 9/11 and the attacks and prepared for war; liberals saw the savagery of the 9/11 attacks and wanted to prepare indictments and offer therapy and understanding for our attackers. In the wake of 9/11, conservatives believed it was time to unleash the might and power of the United States military against the Taliban; in the wake of 9/11, liberals believed it was time to . . . submit a petition. . . .

"Conservatives saw what happened to us on 9/11 and said: We will defeat our enemies. Liberals saw what happened to us and said: We must understand our enemies.

"It was a moment to summon our national will," he thundered, "and to brandish steel."

JUST ANOTHER SUNSHINE PATRIOT

The only steel Rove has ever brandished is a fork, but that didn't slow him down.

Of course he knew that no Democrat or liberal had urged therapy and understanding for the hijackers. He knew that liberals and Democrats had stood squarely behind President Bush to extirpate the Taliban and destroy al Qaeda.

[Their only disappointment is that the Bush administration has prosecuted this war so ineptly, while sinking our military into the Iraqi quicksand.]

It is Rove's disfiguring impact on our political culture that will encapsulate his career. By overreaching for permanent power, he inflicted lasting damage on the nation he swore to serve.

He likes to describe himself as a student of history – so he must also know he cannot escape that dismal legacy by resigning.

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for just a SCRATCH! HA, HA, HA.]

John Kerry was a bonafide Vietnam hero who received medals for bravery in combat, and whose strategy for Swift Boats "under fire" was adopted by the U.S. Navy: When taking fire from a river bank, the Swift Boat should head directly TOWARD the fire, guns blazing. Kerry did this himself, jumping ashore personally to chase Viet Cong who had fired upon his Swift Boat.

SWIFTBOATING KERRY PURE SLIME

Besmirching Kerry's valor in Vietnam was political slime, lower than the sewer. It was carried out by the team defending GWBush's questionable National Guard service, including the Air Force canceling GWBush's flight status because he refused to take urine tests. Some "fighter pilot" President!

Comedian Bill Maher warns America to prepare now for the next phase of "irrelevant but inflammatory issues" designed only to win votes of ignorant yahoos for Republicans. Maher even projects the text of the coming "Swift Boat" distractions to help us brace ourselves:

- We must put the Ten Commandments on the FLAG!!
- We must ban sexual intercourse on CHRISTMAS DAY!!
- We must tell NASA: "No homosexuals in SPACE!!"

The rise to power in America of shameless men like Karl Rove can only be countered by an even more impassioned rise of responsible citizenship and GOTV campaigns ["Get Out The Vote"] by principled rational folks, who really are the vast majority in the U.S.A.

– The author is director of the Peace House in Oklahoma City



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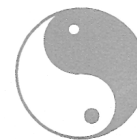
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